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IN THE
SHADOW
OF THE
LORD

BY
MRS. HUGH
FRASER



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IN THE SHADOW OF THE LORD

BY THE SAME AUTHOR
THE SLAKING OF THE SWORD

IN THE SHADOW OF THE LORD

BY
MRS. HUGH FRASER

METHUEN & CO.
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IN THE SHADOW OF THE LORD

BOOK I THE WILD SCOTSMAN

CHAPTER I

THOUGH the month was but May, the heat lay heavy on the land. Along the reaches of the Thames, by copse and bank, a mist veiled the idle creeping of the stream—a stream so shrunk of its raintide fulness that the water-rat's hole was a dusty burrow, and dry-rooting flowers had sprung and bloomed to maturity on soil not rightly theirs. All day the trees had held steady canopies over favoured spots, but as evening approached even they seemed to falter, and their leaves hung faint and sapless.

And now across the fire-bed in the west came shouldering the dark forerunners of the storm, heavy masses of bronze-coloured clouds, thick as reek from a burning city, rent here and there by a tawny gleam from the inner furnaces, where the levin was forging even now.

Though it was but nine of the clock, and the season early summer, the gloom of night had fallen on the big house that had its gardens dipping in the river before and its rich meadows rolling up to low hills behind.

She stood within a foot of the casement, motionless, her hands clasped, scarce breathing, in her fear. On the ground lay the work she had dropped when the first mutterings of the thunder made her spring to her feet. The air seemed to thrill with danger, the silence around her to pulse and fall like moribund breath. A deep-voiced clock somewhere in the house sounded the hour in full, purring strokes. That, at least, was the voice of a friend, and

the startled girl gave a little sigh of relief, and stooped to pick up her fallen embroidery. But even as she stooped, the storm found its strength and crashed down through the valley in fury. A flash of lightning blazed half across the room, painting a slender figure in silver on the darkness.

She pressed the cushioned silk against her ears to shut out the terrifying sounds. "Not this, not this, for my last end!" her lips repeated again and again, while vainly she strove to remember psalms or prayers. She was brave and sweet as any maid alive, but she cowered there without even shame for her fear; she was remembering with aching heart the picture of another girl, friend and playmate, killed at her side as they two ran laughing before a summer storm in the country lanes a year ago. A moment earlier they had been wrangling, lovingly enough, thank God, over a bunch of red lute string that Janet had pinned, Spanish fashion, in the side of her hair. Then the heavens had opened to let out death, and Janet, the gay knot still in her brown curls, had fallen in eternal silence at Mary's feet. What wonder if to-day's storm, and every storm of all the years to come should renew the terror in Mary's heart?

So she knelt there, trembling, while the tempest hurled past on its appointed way. The cushions deadened sound, but did not altogether shut it out, and Mary heard something which made her raise her head suddenly and glance at the half-seen window-panes. The saving rain had come, and was throwing itself in sheets against the glass. The river began to surge more noisily at the foot of the garden, and the leaping of new runnels was on the wind; but the girl's quick young ears had caught another sound, the grinding of a footstep that slipped, and scattered wet pebbles on the gravel walk of the terrace.

There was no public approach to the house on this, its southern side, for the porch looked to the north. No servant would be passing at this hour; Mary's brother, Joseph Ball, had taken his wife and the three children for a week's visit to Mrs. Ball's mother at Oxford, and the young girl was left in the care of the servants, who, with one exception, had taken advantage of her inexperience to wheedle from her permission to attend a village fair on the other side of the Thames, and would certainly not return till late, if they did not make the storm an excuse for remaining away till the morning. Mary was accustomed to the feudal security of the Virginia plantations, where the reigning family, surrounded with veneration akin to worship, let its house doors stand open day and night, year in year out, like those of some great temple. It had

not occurred to her that she might be in a situation of some danger in a rich yet lonely country house, full of valuable objects and guarded only by one old man-servant. Yet, as she heard that unexpected footfall on the gravel path, she sprang to her feet, and, moved by some instinct of self-preservation, went quickly to the window to close and bar the heavy inner shutter against the intruder.

But it was too late. As she reached the casement a face met hers, eye to eye, with only the wet sheeted glass between.

She started back as if she had been struck, and then stood, with beating heart, facing this stranger who sought entrance to her home. The rain had unravelled the web of the storm, and the last pallor of daylight showed her dimly the face beyond the glass, a man's face, sad and dark, with sorrowful eyes and a great high nose, and straight mouth, close shut and resentful. The rain was dripping from his hat and cloak. The next moment it was streaming down on his bare head, for he had removed his hat and was bowing in a manner that showed him well acquainted with the usages of polite society. Some yielding to the entreaty in his eyes, some pity for his dark locks and white forehead thus exposed to the relentless downpour, made Mary feel that it would be inhuman to keep this fine gentleman standing out in the rain for another moment. Her training had taught her to believe that good manners were the invariable accompaniment of good intentions. Therefore she bowed her head gravely in return of his salutation, and began to undo the heavy window fastenings. As the tall casement swung open, the man who was standing outside turned pale and shivered, as if with fear.

The pale-robed figure swayed a little on the inrushing wind. The man still stood speechless and motionless, robbed of his composure by some strong emotion. His hesitation completed the restoration of Mary's self-confidence.

"Will it please you to come in, sir, and take shelter from the rain?" she said, stepping back and leaving the entrance free.

He recovered himself at once, and bowing again very low, stepped quickly past her. She closed the window, and then turned towards him; they two were in the almost darkness of the great, silent room.

"Madam," said the stranger, "your charity will need its counterpart in your forbearance—for it is not I alone who must trespass on both!"

"You have companions?" she asked, sedately. "Have they passed to the other door?"

"But one," he replied, "and he entered with me—the river Thames, if I may judge by the streams which my garments are shedding on this hospitable floor!"

Mary glanced down; her eyes were becoming accustomed to the gloom, and she saw a pale gleam where some rivulet must be creeping towards the edge of her dress from the visitor's voluminous, drenched cloak. She gathered up her shirt and stepped lightly to one side, thinking of what would be madam sister-in-law's dismay could she see this mopping pool on her cherished Turkey carpet! From the point of vantage she held out her hand, saying—

"Pray, sir, permit me to take your hat and cloak from you, and sit you down and rest whilst they shall be a-drying. Nay, but I must have them!" she insisted; and as he made a movement of negation, she gave a decided little nod with her pretty head and came nearer, as if to take them from him.

He retreated a step, nearly falling over a chair in the half darkness.

"But this is highway robbery!" he protested, with a note of amusement in his voice. Then, with a quick movement he stripped himself of the sodden cloak, twisted it into a bundle with his hat, and put both behind him with a turn of his hand. He stood up before her in his close-fitting dress, tall and dark as a mountain fir.

Mary met his eyes, and they were too bright and near for her liking. She turned sharply from him, crossed the room to a table on which, as she knew, stood an old glass bell. Her fingers found it at once, and rang a soft, musical peal which echoed weirdly in the silent place.

It was followed by a less gentle sound—that of a rumble of returning thunder. Then there was silence. No other answer was given to Mary's summons. A nearer peal, preceded by a glare of lightning, showed that the tempest was returning by the way it had come.

The young girl was less terrified now. The need for action would always give her strength. She passed out into the hall, seeking for the servant who should have answered her ringing. He was an old negro who had come to England with her a few months before; he was faithful and devoted, extremely proud of being Mistress Mary's hereditary bondsman, having been left to her by her mother's will. It was rare for him to be remiss in the attendance which was his greatest joy. As Mary threaded her way through the silent corridors, seeking for him, a disturbing phantom of trouble seemed beside her in the dark, and she began

to perceive that she had acted unwisely in granting the other servants such a complete holiday.

"William! William!" she called again and again, but she received no answer. The thought of the stranger, so unmannerly left alone in the drawing-room, troubled her; the disappearance of William Lee caused her real anxiety. And, to make things worse, the thunder was booming out its angry cannonade with growing vehemence.

The great, sweet-smelling kitchen was dark, but a crack of light came from under the door of a closet beyond, used as a still-room by Madam Joseph. Mary opened the door, and beheld a surprising sight. William's one weakness had found him out. He was sitting on the floor, his back against the wall, a candle on the ground at one side, and something on the other, which he hastily covered with the flap of his coat.

"Now, don't say you been calling me, Miss Mary!" he exclaimed, a bright smile on his kindly old black face, his eyes steady, his voice clear. "Why, I'ze been awaiting for to bring you de candles cos I wouldn't disturb you till you ring for dem, honey; and—oh my, Miss Mary, it's dese legs again! Dey jus' won't walk for a minute—one minute dey'll be all right, honey—and was you frightened at de thunder, poor lamb? My, but it's almighty discomfoting, and dat's de truth!"

He was talking on, with alarm and entreaty in his voice, and his twinkling eyes searched his young mistress's face very anxiously.

"William," said Mary, sternly, "get up and come with me this minute! There's nothing the matter with you; and I require you to wait upon a gentleman, who is in the drawing-room, at once! Get up!"

"Yes, Miss Mary; I'm getting up as fast as I can," he replied, and looked up into her face with such an appealing smile that she could hardly help laughing.

She recognized the symptoms with almost more amusement than annoyance. William had suffered from them before, when the keys of the cellar had been left in his keeping. One glass of Mr. Joseph's old port warmed his heart, left his head as clear as a bell, and went at once to his knees. Here was a dilemma!

"I am very much ashamed of you, William," said Mary; "you are just like a naughty child. You promised me you would never touch it again! How much have you had?"

"Only one little teeny, teeny glass, Miss Mary, chile! I'ze so col', I just forgot all about dat promise. See here, de bottle's

mos' full!" And he drew the black, cobwebbed treasure out from under his coat, and held it towards her eagerly.

She took the bottle and set it on a table, with housewifely care. Then she placed the candle beside it, and gravely turned to assist the erring but repentant William.

"Now, William," she said, "I am going to forgive you, and set you on your feet. You have not had enough to do you any harm, and this is all fancy! Come, take hold of my arms!"

And she bent her head towards him, holding out the kind, white hands that were to carry great and precious burdens in the days to come, and smiled down encouragement on her bondsman brother.

The old man took her hand, and touched it to his cheek with a kind of worshipping tenderness.

"You'se just a shinin' angel, Miss Mary," he said; "an' if you don' mind sayin' dem sweet words over my coffin, dis nigger 'll get up out of it, an' come back to wait on yu. Now, ma honey, one little pull——"

He was on his feet—a tall, old darkie in a red coat—the candle-light gleaming in his soft eyes and on his grey, woolly hair. Mary thought it prudent to guide his steps for a moment; and they started out together, she carrying the candle, and William hobbling along at her side.

"You do go planter's pace, Miss Mary," he chuckled, trying to keep up with her swift steps; then he arrested her before a great mahogany dresser in the dining-hall, through which they were passing. "Let me light de proper silver candlestick," he pleaded. "I can carry it all safe now; and we leave dat kitchen rubbish here."

So it came to pass that the man waiting in the drawing-room beheld his hostess return in fairly dignified fashion, accompanied by an old negro servant in fine livery, who held a great three-branched silver candlestick high above her head as she re-entered the room.

By that tempered radiance he saw her clearly for the first time—a tall and stately maid, with eyes like morning skies, golden curls clustering round a high, white brow, proud yet gentle features, and rose-flushed cheeks, for her recent exertions had brought back the colour lately banished by the terrors of the storm. Round her fair neck was one close row of pearls; her rich yet simple dress of white satin shadowed with some stripe of duller silk had the long waist and decorous lines of the days of good Queen Anne: there was no hoop to lift it from the ground, and, as she moved,

the deep folds rustled softly in accompaniment to her steps. Instinctively the man drew back, his tense gaze fixed on her, as if trying to recognize some vision of long ago.

"Lor' o' Battles, who's dis?" muttered William, staring at the apparition of the tall, dark man in rain-drenched clothes, who stood motionless in the middle of the room.

"Sir," said Mary, stopping short at some distance from the stranger, "permit my servant to show you to an apartment where you can rest and be provided with other garments while yours shall be a-drying. William, take this gentleman to Mr. Joseph's room."

Her visitor recovered himself, and remembered the laws of good manners. He came a step nearer, bowed, and said—

"I must not take advantage of your charity, madam, until I have told you who I am, and shall also have explained how I came to seek entrance to this kindly house in such an irregular manner. My name is McClean—of Duart; and I hope you will not condemn it as that of a rude intruder breaking unbidden into a lady's presence. I am a stranger in this part of the country, and am staying but since yesterday in the house of a friend near Cookham. I had wandered much further from it than I intended, and when the storm broke was looking for a very necessary refuge from apparently imminent drowning, having reached the banks of a river which appeared to be rising round my feet. In retreating from it I passed through an open gate which must have led me into your garden, and the next moment was a very fortunate one for me, since it brought me here."

The last words were said with another bow, and some inflection which must have been distasteful to the lady, for she stiffened perceptibly, and replied—

"I thank you, sir; you are indeed some little distance from Cookham, although that is to us the nearest village. This is the home of Mr. Joseph Ball—my brother. He is, unfortunately, away from home."

Robin McClean's face lighted up. "Now, here is the kindest of chances," said he. "I have come a long way to see Mr. Ball, carrying in my pocket a letter (if it be not already dissolved in dampness) from a friend of his in the north—one McClintock, a worthy lawyer, who hath earnestly commended me to Mr. Ball's good offices."

"You know Mr. Alexander McClintock?" said Mary, relenting from her passing severity. "I have heard my brother speak of him. Why, now I remember—and I pray you to excuse my

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tardiness—brother Joseph did get a letter from that gentleman some ten days since, announcing your coming upon matters of grave business import. But—have you not another name, Mr. McClean? For it seems to me that that is not the one I heard my brother read out——” She hesitated, blushing at seeming to mistrust a gentleman’s account of himself, yet no way willing to accept it if inconsonant with the facts.

Robin McClean was quick to justify himself. “Doubtless McClintock called me Lord Drumardlee,” he said. “Ah, I see, that was it! That name is also honestly mine, but I forget it in my own country. And now, madam, if you will but allow your servant to set me on the right road, I will thank you for your kindness and depart, and honour myself with paying a visit to Mr. Ball at a more propitious moment.”

“But I will not hear of it,” said Mary, with quick decision. “My brother would never forgive me if I so disgraced his hospitality as to allow you to go away, unguided and alone, to tramp for miles through such a night as this! Why, you would be drowned, you poor soul, and a foolish girl would be accessory to the disaster!” And she laughed, and nodded her pretty head as if she were talking to a child or a dependent.

Now she was speaking in tones of easy command: “We have stayed talking far too long; pray let William take you to my brother’s room and change your wet clothes for dry ones, and I will mix a hot posset which shall make you forget your fatigues and dispose you to indulgence for what will be a poor supper, since, alas, most of our domestics did go to the fair, and I doubt they’ll not find their ways home again just yet!”

William set his candlestick down on a polished table, where it reflected itself in rings of brightness; then he lighted a smaller one from it, and standing at one side of the door prepared to obey Mary’s orders, with a look of grim discontent on his old face. Robin McClean approached the girl, and stood for a moment before her as if about to speak. She raised her eyes questioningly, but he said nothing and turned sharply away towards the door. As he passed through it, he heard her say to the servant—

“When you have done what is necessary for the gentleman, William, come to me in the dining-room.”

William turned and gave her an imploring look, then he followed McClean, passed him, and led the way to the foot of a broad double staircase which wound up into the darkness from a circular space at the far end of the hall; here, where the curving

stairways separated, stood a huge china vase nearly as big as a man, brought from the inaccessible regions of Cathay, for Madam Joseph had a fine taste in porcelain.

McClellan noted it mechanically, as he did many other things that night. The great house seemed to be speaking, even in its silence, of some safe and ordered dignity of living, as far removed from the rough state of the Highland chieftain as from the extravagant luxury of the world of fashion. As he ascended the broad, polished steps behind the old servant, he was thinking how different was his welcome here to that which he would have received, in the same circumstances, from a young and unprotected girl in the far north. There such a one would have fled at his approach, and would have locked herself into some place of safety, leaving him to the mercy of such servants as she had; as for London—he almost laughed as he thought what would happen to a man who should knock at the door of a great house for shelter from a storm! Was this another, and an honester, kinder, world that was opening its doors to him?

William had reached a landing, and halted there for the guest, who had been following but slowly, to rejoin him. There was the sound of a closing door below; then to the man above came up through the unlit space the sound of a hymn, sung soft and low, keeping time to light steps moving in the hall.

“And you shall fear no foe by night
Nor poisoned dart by day,
The Shadow of the Lord is o’er
The just man’s righteous way.”

The gentle notes died away as the footsteps receded, and were lost in the distance. But they had stirred some strong emotion in the heart of the hearer. William touched him on the arm respectfully.

“Dis way, sah, if you please, sah,” he said.

McClellan looked at him across the candle flame, and the old man drew back from the strange expression on his face. His eyes seemed to be framing a question, but no sound came for a moment. Then he said huskily—

“Who’s that—singing?”

“Why, that’s Miss Mary,” said William. “She just sing like to keep herself company, but she don’t want for dat—bless her! I guess dere’s scores ob shinin’ angels round wherever she goes!”

CHAPTER II

THE dining-hall of the house by the river was a large and stately apartment, hung with Spanish leather from whose golden background shone out monster red roses and blue peacocks. A heavy screen of the same leather stood between the table and the door, to mask the coming and going of the servants on their errands to the kitchen ; but to-night there were none to hasten in and out. Mary took the service upon herself, until William should be at liberty to assist her. With quick steps she went from side to side of the great square table, spreading the snowy fragrant napery and setting beaker and flagon, silver and china in its place. Now and then she would pause, finger on lip, scanning the board, and asking herself if anything were forgotten. Fortunately the larder was well provisioned ; there were cold meats, both salt and fresh, delicate cheeses, a sweet pasty, and the fine home-made bread whose baking Madam Joseph was wont to superintend in person ; altogether a very passable supper to set before a chance visitor.

As the table looked somewhat large and empty still, the girl set on it a great bowl of roses, culled before the storm, and these, under the soft warmth of the wax candles, gave out their full, sweet scent. She bent her head over them lovingly, and raised it to find William standing opposite to her, his hands on the back of a tall chair, and his head shaking in silent disapprobation.

"What is wrong, William?" she asked, laughing. "Have I put the forks upside down, or given the gentlemen two spoons and no knife? Surely I have not made any mistake this time!" And her glance scanned the result of her labours.

"It's all wrong, Miss Mary, chile, and dat's de fact! Not de table, honey, you done it first rate, like you do mos' things—but the gen'man, Miss Mary! Lor' o' Battles, you can't have him here to supper all alone with you! This ain't Virginny, honey—don't I wish it war! The people's got tongues like the wrong end of a corn cob, and you'se a young lady all by yourself!"

Mary flushed as red as the roses. Then her head went up in the air and she met her mentor's anxious glance with a flash of anger in her blue eyes.

"I am only one thing at present, William," she replied, "the mistress of Mr. Joseph's house, doing what is right for his guest. You may bring a bottle of Madeira from the second bin on the right, and set some Burgundy in loo-warm water till I ring for it."

William edged round the table towards her. "I done dat already, Miss Mary—I knows Mr. Joseph's ways! But see here, honey, I done tell the gentleman you'se aunt upstairs, pretty sick, so when he come down you better take a glass of wine and some cake on a plate and run along to keep her company. Don't you worry chile, it's my lie, not yours, and he's only a stranger, and I'd tell a power of stories to keep a gentleman from sayin' you was having him to supper all by yourself!"

Mary turned on him with judgment stern on her young face. She would have spoken, but it was too late. Robin McClean had found his way downstairs, and, attracted by the light and the sound of voices, was already standing in the doorway. The girl checked the reproof on her lips, and made a little gesture, inviting the guest to enter, while William, overjoyed at the seasonable interruption, shuffled away to get the Madeira from its home in bin number two. He had gained his point, and devoutly hoped that his young mistress, whose zeal for truth often caused him great anxiety, would not so far mistake her duty as to contradict his statement.

"Yes," he pondered, as he trotted on, "Miss Mary just now mighty angry—but de story's a most honorable an' useful story. Dere won't be no liars in Miss Mary's heaven, says she, dat's where the white folks go—but dere'll be plenty where the darkies get in! What's old black Billy got to do with truth an' untruth anyhow? Mighty persuming I'se call it! An' I believe the 'postle Jonah himself would 'a' made up that sick aunt for Miss Mary to-night, so I do!"

Meanwhile Miss Mary, just touched to a certain consciousness of restraint by her servant's blunt words, was dispensing majestic hospitality to the stranger whom the storm had driven to her gates. She looked very fair as she stood at the opposite side of the table, her head bent and her hands lightly clasped, saying the simple grace without which it would have seemed impossible to her that any one should wish to break bread. The scent of the roses was wafted to McClean as he stood by his chair, watching her silently. Many things had dropped away, and many others

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had come back to him on this eventful night. He was in grace and he was in pain, and for the thousandth time life seemed sore and difficult, for the first time so enchanting sweet that a moment of it would repay him for all the rest. Well, the moment he would have, come what might. Then Mary's gentle voice said "Amen."

"Amen," echoed the man, to far other invocation.

Mary was moving round the table, meaning to hasten William on his errand. As she passed Robin, the movement of her dress made a little wind beside him, and from it came to him the scent of that incense of the rose of which the room was full, the very air of sweet and heavenly purity.

She paused at the door, where a sconce against the wall made a pool of silver light. In that she turned and smiled at him.

"Forgive me," she said, "I must look for William. I pray you to be seated."

Robin McClean obeyed her, and sat down. He flung his arms on the table and hid his face upon them, battling with the highest and the lowest that goes to the making of man. Nor did he move till her returning feet sounded on the threshold. Then he stood up and faced her, with words of thanks for all the trouble she was so graciously taking for him.

The next moment she was filling his glass with mellow, ruby-coloured wine. He drank it greedily, and felt that some questions were better left unanswered. The present, warm and fair, was his.

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She talked on, eating daintily, as if to keep him company. She had been telling him of her home across the water, of the old house on the Rappahannack, where the sun shone, and the mocking-birds sang; of the corn-husking, when the little negro children rolled from top to bottom of the golden pile, and the men and women worked like mad till one army beat the other and the rewards were meted out, and the dancing and singing began only to finish at moon-set next morning. It was all a fairy tale to the Highlander, a saga of light and beauty whose reality he would never see. But she made it real to his quick imagination, and he sat gazing at her with half closed eyes, seeing in his dream that golden head moving under the maple bough where the sun shot through—seeing those white and shapely hands reaching out to the little black ones that caught at her skirts, perhaps lifting them till they clung round her neck where the pearls lay in the

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warm shadow, where a man would give his youth to set his lips to-night.

"It is all behind me now," said Mary, with a sigh, and a shadow came over her down-cast face. "Very far away now. But you should visit Virginia, sir. There is no country in the world so beautiful or so kind."

"That I can well believe," said he, shortly. But he never took his eyes from her face.

She had not been looking at him. Her thoughts were in the old home, with the mother she had idolized and lost. But some constraining power made her raise her eyes and meet that steady glance. It told her how beautiful she was, that he was man and she woman, and that there were things in life of which she had known nothing until now.

"What is it, William?" she said, turning with deepened colour to the servant who touched her arm to attract her attention. He had prepared on a silver salver a glass of wine and a tiny plate of cakes and fruit.

"Won't you be taking this up to Miss Elizabeth?" he said, loud enough for Robin to hear him. "De gals is all out, and it's gone struck 'leven, Miss Mary!"

But the girl drew back, her anger showing instantly in her changed expression. William should not betray her into endorsing this wretched fabrication, and besides, he had dared to use her sister's name. Indeed, it was the first he could remember at that anxious moment.

"Do, Miss Mary, honey," he whispered, "dere's a dear lamb! You oughter been in bed dis long while!"

Mary rose, feeling, in spite of her annoyance, that he was right. It was over late for a maid to be sitting talking to a stranger. But nothing would induce her to touch the deceitful little tray.

"If you will excuse me, sir," she said, curtsying very grandly to Robin, "I will now retire. William will attend you to your room. I trust you will sleep well."

Then she left him, and William picked up the salver and followed her hastily. Robin was silent. When they were gone he walked round the table, bent over the chair on which she had been sitting, and kissed the place where her head had rested against the tall, leather back.

As in a dream he followed William a little later to the stiffly furnished chamber on the upper floor where he had prepared himself for supper. Everything he could need had been disposed

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for him by the care of the servant. It was as if he had been expected for weeks. He tried to detain the old man to talk with him a little, eager to hear more of the history of his hostess.

"My!" William whistled softly, as he drew the curtains across the glass, "seems like de river just slapping itself up agin the door! Wish I could push dis old house a bit up de hill!"

"Does Mr. Ball ever smoke tobacco?" inquired Robin from the other end of the room. He was longing for the soothing counsel of a gentle pipe.

"Course he does, sah," replied William briskly. "Why, he grows de finest leaf in all Virginny! Shall I bring a pipe for you, sah?"

"I should like one," said Robin, "if—if it will not disturb Mistress Mary for me to smoke it here."

William gave him a quick glance. "Not a little teeny bit, sah," he replied. "Miss Mary won't know nothing about it, 'cos she sleep with her grandmother far away off the other end ob the house."

"Her grandmother?" Robin asked, surprised by the existence of another old lady in this silent mansion.

"Her grandmother *and* her aunt, sah," William asseverated desperately, remembering the first degree of relationship invented for Miss Mary's protection. "You can smoke all you like, sah! Dey won't never smell it! Shure not!" and he grinned joyfully over his own little joke.

He opened a cabinet and drew out a jar and two pipes, and laid them by the candle on a little table. The mere handling of the tobacco was a pleasure to him, so he filled a pipe for Robin, talking half to himself the while.

"Ah, de finest leaf dats growed!" he murmured. "When de Lord made Virginny 'bacco He said, 'Here's somethin's 's sweet as molasses and strong as rum, and cool like moonshine at de end of a workin' day!' Dere, sah, if you don' sleep like a baby after dat smoke it's 'cos you ain't said your prayers! Good-night, sah—and don't set de house on fire!"

"The rain would put it out if I did," laughed Robin, amused by the old man's enthusiasm. Thus the door closed on William, and the guest was alone.

He did not relapse into quiet contemplation at once. The day had been a long and exciting one, full of strange pictures which chased each other in rapid succession through his brain. He had seen the sun rise on the face of a doomed man. Was that only this morning? The ugly fight under the pale sky, the

fury stamped for ever on the face of the untimely dead ; Herries, his impatient scoff at his cousin's sensitiveness, his businesslike haste to resume the shackles of his fruitless existence—was he, Robin, indeed separated from all that by only a few hours? How much had this summer's storm washed away! The dark sheeted rain might have been a river of milk and gold, carrying him into some enchanted land of sunshine and peace. To-night, London, with its roaring vices, its flaunting women and corrupt men, its musk and paint and powder and sin, might have been Babylon or Xanadhu for any nearness it seemed to have. He had been there but a few days, and they had made him feel old and spent. He had seen squalor face to face and knew it for what it was.

But here, ah, what another climate took his being, what fine, clean ways and gracious airs did greet the spirit of a man! Were they true, then, the visions of the winter night and the March daylight in the north? Was this regeneration, sweet and masterful—was the star hovering over a golden head, pillowed on purity somewhere in this silent house?

Good God, what of Red Jean? He had not thought of her since he left Castle Duart. Now, indeed, he was glad to sit down and light his pipe.

How it rained! Was it always like this in the Thames valley in summer? If so, why did people not build their dwellings a little further up the slopes and away from the stream? That sounded alarmingly near in Mary's ears as she stood by her window trying in vain to see into the darkness without. This was her first visit to England, whither she had come in the late autumn with her brother, returning there from one of his journeys to Virginia. Mary had accompanied him gladly, for since the death of her mother and that of her kind stepfather, she had felt lonely, in spite of the kindness of her beloved half-sister, Elizabeth Bonurn, and had experienced all the difficulties that befall a young girl left not unprovided for, but obliged to live under the protection of relatives who, however well disposed, might possibly regard the care of her as a burden. Their panacea for a girl's troubles was marriage, and this course had been pressed on Mary with persistence which finally turned to dismay; for she steadily refused all offers, and having reached the age of nineteen unmarried, was looked upon as one probably doomed to the terrors of spinsterhood for life. Her playmates had all taken husbands years ago, and some were already mothers of blooming families. Mary gave no reasons for her unusual course, beyond the grave assertion that she had no wish

to change her state. When a notable landowner had solemnly asked her to be mistress of his house, she curtsied gracefully and replied that she was sensible of the honour of being addressed by him, but that she was quite unworthy of it and must beg to be excused. Her beauty and brightness had attracted more than one fine young gentleman to come and sigh his heart out at her feet. But these applicants were treated less ceremoniously; dismissed with few and laughing words, they withdrew, swearing eternal constancy and immediate suicide, also declaring that the "Rose of Epping Forest," as she was called, from the name of one of her homes, had indeed the beauty of the rose, but a heart of ice in place of its warm golden one. Assisting at the marriage of a rejected suitor, who had speedily consoled himself with the more facile conquest of one of her friends, she set the rather shamefaced young man at his ease by smilingly telling him how, long years ago, when they were all children, this very girl had singled him out from the little tribe that played and studied together, and had declared to Mary in private that she should certainly persuade the Indians to tomahawk any rival who should come between her and the object of her choice.

As Mary had said to Robin McClean, the old life seemed very far behind her now. In coming to England with Joseph she felt that she was doing the wisest thing that lay in her choice; her veneration for her brother's wisdom and goodness was unbounded, and if, in her whole-hearted humility, she over-estimated his intellectual powers, she was safe in the strength of his brotherly affection for his young orphan sister. If the girl's pure, warm heart had ever been touched by other than home loves, none knew it but herself, nor would she to herself acknowledge it. When, now and again, in her loving memories of her distant home, a tall and stately figure seemed to centralize those memories for a moment, Mary turned away resolutely and threw herself with redoubled good will into the happy tasks and interests of her life in her brother's English household. Her sister-in-law, Fidelia Ball, though a somewhat jealous and quick-tempered woman, had come to regard Molly as the kindest and most sweet-tempered of companions; Joseph's little daughter Susie was never weary of drawing "Auntie Molly" into her games or listening to the wonderful stories which she had drunk in, in her own childhood, from the lips of Mammy Ju, the faithful old nurse who had cherished more than one generation of her first master's heirs. Even the lordly baby-boy was as happy in his aunt's arms as in those of his capable, bustling mamma, a woman so immersed in household

matters that she was often glad to have such an able lieutenant in the nursery.

It was with reluctance on her brother's part that Mary had been left behind when the family travelled up to Oxford for the half-yearly visit to Madam Lethbridge, Mrs. Ball's mother. But the old lady's house was small, and her resources also limited, she being the widow of a naval officer who had fought with distinction under Queen Anne. There was hardly room for her daughter's growing family in the little building just outside the town, and it would have been impossible for her to house one more guest. So Mary, quite undaunted by the prospect of a week's solitude, had remained at Cookham, and had promised Mrs. Joseph to keep a stern eye on the maids, who were to be sure to do the grand washing which was regularly kept over from the dark winter days until sun and summer came to the lavender's aid, and the green meadows near the house were all a-wing with snowy linen, flapping and blanching in the sunshine. The threatening skies to-day had deterred the women from the great undertaking, and they were now presumably rejoicing, somewhere on the Surrey side of the river, over the prolonged holiday procured for them by the storm.

Mary turned away from the window and came back to where her candle made a solitary gleam in the spacious room, dim and dark in its far corners in spite of the white walls which rose tall and bare, above the breast-high wainscoting of brown oak. Those were not the days of crowded ornamentation in sleeping apartments. A tall old press against one wall faced the huge four-post bed, with its curtains and canopy of blue and white flowered sagathy; a few straight-backed chairs stood at regular intervals against the wainscot; on a painted table in a corner was a splendid Dutch ewer and basin of beaten brass, which gave forth yellow reflections in the fitful light, and on a smaller table beside the bed, right in the rays of the candle, Mary's Bible lay open at the chapter she had been reading for the night, her pearl necklace laid across the pages to keep them in place. On a little shelf above, was a copy of Mr. Pope's earlier poems, accompanied by a metrical version of the Psalms and a volume of George Herbert's works, all well read, although perhaps less time had been spent over them than over the basket of work which occupied the central table, or over the graceful old spinning-wheel which stood beside a low chair near the window. These somewhat ascetic surroundings were sweetened by an indescribable air of delicate neatness, and the whole room smelt of dried rose-leaves and lavender, gathered on sunny mornings from the rich garden borders.

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Mary approached the light, and kneeling down, attempted to apply her mind to the terrifying prophecies of Habakkuk, to which point her daily readings had brought her for the second time in her life. To-night, with that roar of angry waters in her ears, she could get no further than the words, "And Thou wilt make men as fishes of the sea," a curiously appropriate prediction, poor Mary thought, for a night when skies and stream seemed leagued to sweep all things away in a devastating flood!

She had laid aside her pretty dress and replaced it by a skirt of light blue camelot and a short jacket, called in those days a bed-gown, of the same colour. The usual hour for her beauty sleep was long past.

Mary had paused by the bed, and was looking down at the creature's shining red cheeks with loving amusement when she was startled by a timid knock at the door. She crossed the room, and opened it to find William standing outside, candle in hand, and fear writ clear upon his countenance.

"What has happened?" asked Mary, a good deal alarmed.

"I just thought yu might be frightened, honey," he said, and his voice shook as he spoke, "so I came to tell yu dere ain't no danger at all, no sort o' danger. I'se got all de doors bolted, but—oh Miss Mary, dat ole river he's two feet high outside and comin' through dem cracks till de carpets is like wet towels, an' I kind o' feel de house floatin' up an' down under my feet! Yu quite shure de Lord'll never send another big flood?"

Mary put aside the theological question to be answered later. "Wait a minute," she said, "I will go down with you and see what can be done!"

Then she fetched a pair of clogs from a corner, threw a red cloak over her shoulders, and prepared to lead the way down-stairs.

"Give me the candle," she exclaimed, for the old man's hand was shaking, and a little rain of hot tallow began to bedew the polished floor. He gave up the candlestick gladly and followed as fast as he could the click of her high heels along the sounding corridor to the head of the stairs. As they reached it, a furious gust of wind rattled every window in the house, and one, far off in the kitchen regions, burst open with a crash of broken glass.

Mary paused and looked questioningly at William, although she was not in the habit of expecting counsel from that quarter.

"That will be the dairy," she said, "and a month's butter on the shelves! This is dreadful!"

He met her gaze with one of still greater dismay; then he turned and shook his fist at the darkness of the gallery to the left of the landing.

"The devil brought yu and de bad luck," he muttered, "and de devil take yu away together!"

Far down the passage a door opened, creaking, and a ray of light became visible. Then there was silence.

"Come," said Mary, shortly; and she turned and pattered down the stairs, William following with repeated glances over his shoulder, as if he expected the authority he had invoked to answer his appeal on the spot.

From the edge of the lowest step Mary's foot went into two inches of water. With a little scream she drew back, and, raising the light, peered into the ghostly spaces around and beyond its feeble rays. There was a sound of gurgling and lapping. From where she stood a long arrow of broken light shone on wetness away to the further door, the one which opened to the garden. What was to be done? Nothing that she could think of, and she felt painfully helpless as she gazed before her. How much higher would that slow-creeping flood continue to rise? What damage had it done already? Perhaps it had not invaded the rooms on either side of the hall yet. They were raised from it by a shallow step. Oh, for brother Joseph, to protect all his beautiful things! She was sure he would have been able to do so—almost sure that the water would have turned back at his command.

Still the brave young lieutenant would do what she could. "Let us try to get into the drawing-room," she said to William. "It stands higher than the floor of the hall, and you can at least pull up the carpet before the water reaches it."

She gathered up her skirts and resolutely started to cross the flooded space, William following and making much outcry as he splashed along in her wake, also vowing illicit sacrifices of cocks and hens to some nameless darky deities if he ever found himself safe in Old Virginia again. They reached the door, and he came forward to open it as Mary lowered her candle to show him the brass handle. He stood for an instant fumbling with that, turned it at last and pulled the door open. In the same instant one of the tall window casements at the far end of the room gave way with a crash and the whole wet fury of the storm burst into the house and enveloped those two in wind-torn darkness, extinguishing the light and causing the young girl to catch at the doorpost for support, while a scud of rain was blown on her face and hair. Even then she did not lose her presence of mind.

This was easier to face than that terrible thunder a few hours ago.

"Are you there, William," she cried; "come, we must close the window at any risk!"

She did not wait for an answer, but advanced into the room, battling against the wind, guiding herself by meeting it, and bruising herself more than once against the furniture in her quest. She reached the window at last, but William had either not followed or had missed her in the darkness, and she clung there alone, water rushing round her feet, drenching her hair, her shoulders, her arms, as she struggled to move the shutter from where it had swung against the inner wall and where the force of the whirlwind held it as in a vice.

"Help!" she cried, turning her head back to send her voice into the room.

Quick steps answered her appeal. Some one was beside her. McClean had found her in the darkness—his left arm was round her, lifting her back to shelter, to his side, where he held her close while his right hand dragged the shutter from its groove and pushed it into place by sheer force. He threw himself against it, dragging her with him, and their weight kept it closed to the wind that buffeted madly on it from without. For one wild instant the man held her clasped to him, and the blood danced in flame through his veins, and the darkness to him seemed the heart of a star, and the very songs of Heaven pealed in his ears.

It took that instant for her, dazzled and shaken by the elements' stress, to realize that he was touching her. Ere it ended she had torn herself from him, and crossed the room at a bound. Instinctively she clung to something—the great chair by which she had been kneeling when the thunder-clap came. She was trembling from head to foot, and knew not whether she or the house itself were swaying, falling in the darkness. What awful primeval forces were these sweeping round her to-night? Where was the kind Providence that had kept her till now? She seemed to be in a dream of horror and blackness and encircling arms.

Ah, yes, it was but a dream! She was waking now. A steady voice called to her: "Mistress Mary," it said, from the other side of the dark, "if you can find your servant, bring him to help me. I cannot hold this more than a few minutes longer."

Then came William's voice from the hall. "Are you dere, Miss Mary? All safe? I'se coming's quick as I can!"

He had managed to get a light again, and peered in at the

door. Mary pointed mutely to the window. He reached it, and with more deftness than could have been expected, loosened a heavy iron bar and slid it into its place, McClean holding the shutters with all his might meanwhile.

When it was done, William turned and addressed his mistress, ignoring his other auditor completely.

"I been upstairs to look out, Miss Mary, and de water's coming right up! Dere ain't a scrap of garden left dis side! You got to come right out of de house, honey, an' I'll carry you up behind de stables on de hill. Dis place 'll be like the middle ob de ocean by morning!"

"Oh, surely there is no danger!" said Mary, recalled to herself by this new aspect of her situation.

But now McClean intervened. "The house lies very low, and these floods are fearfully sudden things, I have been told. Pray, madam, let your servant bring you into safety if there is another building higher up."

He spoke with almost exaggerated deference, and Mary, too bewildered to reply, looked from him to her servitor in great distress.

"You are thinking of the ladies upstairs," said Robin, politely. "I fear your grandmother and aunt must be greatly alarmed. When you are in safety, doubtless William and I can convey them to the same spot."

This was too much for the girl's much-trying nerves. With a little cry she sank into the big chair, hid her face in her hands, and then broke into smothered but uncontrollable laughter.

Robin stared at her in amazement. William hastily stepped between them so as to hide her from his view.

"Dere, dere, Miss Mary dear," he entreated; "don't take on like dat! You're tired to death, and frightened out of your wits, an' no wonder! My!" as the house rocked again, "who ever seen such a night? De Devil's come for somebody, sure!" And he glared at the visitor, who, as he firmly believed, had brought all this disturbance in his train.

Robin came and stood beside the young lady's chair. She was laughing still, not hysterically, but with soft little ripples of amusement. Suddenly she looked up and met his puzzled glance. Her pretty hair, all tossed and damp, hung over her brow in wet, gold rings. The soft, rosy cheeks, the smiling lips and innocent eyes might have been those of a child.

"Oh, yes," she cried, cured of all her tremors by the humour of the situation in which she found herself, "be sure to bring the

dear old ladies, if you can only find them! Oh, William, William!"

And in spite of her efforts to repress it, the happy laughter bubbled up again. William was wringing his hands in the back-ground.

"I fail to understand——" Robin began. There was something very strange in all this, and a joke unshared is never enlivening to the onlooker.

Mary rose. "You will, sir," she said; "you certainly will when daylight comes. Forgive my untimely mirth, I pray you. I should die of fright if I had to go out in this tempest! Indeed, I could not think of leaving the house; it seems the only thing I am sure of to-night, and I am not at all afraid of its being swept away. William must do what he can to make things secure—and—and I am very sorry, sir, that your rest has been disturbed. I wish you a very good night, my lord!"

She was quite composed and grave now, and the use of the title, just remembered as his due, seemed to put him a thousand miles away from her. He held the door open for her to pass out, and never knew how she found her way across the wet hall and up the unlighted stairs, for when she was gone he turned sharply to William and bade him show him round all the apartments on the ground floor where doors or windows might give way.

The old man obeyed with alacrity, and for an hour or more, Mary, listening wide-eyed in her big blue and white bed, heard, above the roar of wind and rain, the hammering of planks being fastened against weak places, of which, as she knew, there were many in the more subordinate regions of the rambling old house.

There was one thing in the night's experiences which she resolutely refused to remember. To keep it away she followed in her mind the steps of those two watchers downstairs. Now they must have reached the store-room—were the jams and pickles safe? Now the dairy—alas, for the beautiful golden butter piled there that morning! Now they must be coming back, through the linen-room and the still-room. Oh why, just as gentle sleep seemed hovering near, did a thought sting her cheek to burning as with a blow? Tears and laughter, fears, reliefs—each had visited her to-night, claiming its moment's place in the passing hours, but these would be forgotten in their time. Not so the first breath of a passion that had flamed on her, as woman, from man.

She sprang up and knelt by her bed, a white, shimmering form

in the growing dawn. "Thou, my Father and my God," she prayed, "a thing has passed near me which is not of Thee. All such my spirit does abhor. Creating, Thou didst make me for Thee ; redeeming, bought me back when I was lost to Thee. Keep me under the shadow of Thy wings, my Father and my God."

Then she lay down and slept, at peace.

CHAPTER III

MARY awoke from the depths of cool and dreamless sleep to see a handmaid standing in the full rays of the sun by the window, examining some garments which lay on a chair. She was a fresh, rosy lass, neatly dressed in brown kirtle, spotless apron, and frilled cap, and she was fingering Mary's damp skirt with fastidious puckering of brow and dainty touches, as if she had never heard of last night's storm. Mary lay and watched her for a moment. Nancy had caught sight of something else—the little discoloured clogs, which spoke of adventurous excursion.

As she raised her hands in dismay, her mistress spoke, and the tone was somewhat severe.

"I am glad to see you have returned, Nancy," she said; and then she sat up and shook her hair out of her eyes and blinked at the yellow sunshine.

"Oh, Miss Mary," exclaimed the girl, "are you awake? What a night it was! I just sat and cried till the day broke and we could see to get back to you. There wasn't no coming home before, or I'd never have stayed away and let you put yourself to bed and all, that I wouldn't!"

"You should have come home much earlier, before the storm broke at all," said Mary, "and I think Madam Ball would have been very much annoyed with you all."

"Oh, please don't tell her, Miss Mary," said the girl, clasping her hands. "We couldn't help it, indeed, and Mrs. Price and cook was as much put out as me! The ferryman said he'd lose his life and his boat, too, which it's more to him, poor man, if he tried to cross the river last night. It's gone down now, not the boat but the river, I mean, and the sun shining beautiful! Which gown will you be pleased to put on, ma'am, and what will you be having for your breakfast, cook says? It's gone eight, and the milk's all soured with the thunder, and we've been at the floors with mops this last hour, but it's all a-wet downstairs, and Mrs. Price says she do see the mould a-coming out already!"

Nancy stopped, out of breath, hoping that her sensational news would cause the overlooking of her own shortcomings.

"Give me my linsey skirt and red stockings," said the young lady. "I suppose you must be forgiven, Nancy, but I hope you will not fail in your duties again."

"Never, never, Miss Mary," said the repentant maid, "and it is good of you to say you'll not tell madam!"

"Did I say so?" Mary remarked, "well, perhaps I will not this time. It certainly was a dreadful night. Oh"—and her face clouded as some things came back to her memory—"has William attended to the gentleman? I will have my bread and milk here, I think."

"The gentleman?" replied Nancy, staring at her mistress in surprise. "Why you have forgotten, ma'am, Mr. Joseph went away yesterday! There's only you in the house, Miss Mary! And William we can't find. Mrs. Price do say we wasn't the only ones that never came home last night!"

"Never mind what Mrs. Price says," replied the young girl, loftily, "William was here at two o'clock this morning barring the doors and windows your carelessness had left unclosed. You may go, Nancy; I will call you when I am ready for my breakfast."

Nancy departed, and Mary rose and ran on bare feet to the window, and looked out. She had felt a great relief on finding that Robin was gone, William probably accompanying him to set him on the right road. Seen in the clear light of the morning's sunshine, yesterday's proceedings were somewhat disturbing. Joseph would certainly be much displeased to hear that his young sister had been obliged to receive an unknown guest alone. The chance had not been of her choosing, and she knew she had acted rightly, for Christianity, if not propriety, forbade that any wayfarer should be turned adrift in such conditions; but, alas, the most righteous actions are not the ones most immune of unfortunate consequences in this world, whatever reward they may claim in the next.

The sight of the half-ruined garden with a new expanse of rippling water at its further extremity drew the girl's thoughts with something of a shock to practical things. There was much occupation waiting for her activity, and it was not long before she was downstairs, calling the gardener and stable-boys to clear the paths of mud and rubbish deposited by the flood, to tie up the half-drowned plants that had survived the visitation, and clear out those which it had battered into ruin. The day was warm, and the sun,

as he mounted to the zenith, drew up hot steam in clouds of mist from the drenched earth.

Indoors the maids were busy with mops and clouts and many an outcry of dismay, setting the rooms to rights. Mrs. Price had wept bitter tears on finding her butter pats and cheeses skating over a muddy floor, and William had improved the occasion by assuring her that her sins would always find her out, and "she'd better go an' cry over de iniquities of de human heart, 'stead of wasting good tears over a lot of rubbishy trash dat dey'd throw to de hogs in Virginny! T'ink she knowed somefin' 'bout butter? Not much! Jus' wait till she see de sort Mammy Ju turned out!" And so on till Mrs. Price was fairly exasperated, and a plate would have cracked itself against William's head had he not ducked with surprising celerity and retreated to his own fortress in the pantry.

It was he who had suggested to McClean, as soon as the daylight shone blue and clear, that most likely there would be another storm soon, and perhaps it would be wise to take advantage of this hour to find his way home. The old man was anxious to get him away before the return of the maids, whose tongues he feared, seeing that in this godless country servants were not members of the family, but hirelings who dared freely to discuss the actions of their betters. Before setting out, he put away the pipes and tobacco, and pushed back into rigid order the furniture of the room occupied for a few hours by Robin. He thought he could trust to luck for the further concealment of the gentleman's presence, since his imperious young mistress was not one to chatter and gossip with the inferiors whom William classed indiscriminately under the heading of "po' white trash." Happy was he when, having escorted Robin for a mile or so on the road to Cookham, he sauntered back towards six of the clock on that dewy, sunshot morning, and found a bevy of draggled, frightened maids trying to enter the back door, the key of which lay in his pocket. Nancy's report of him to Mary was made up in sheer spite, to punish him for the lecture he administered on the doorstep before he would let her and her colleagues into the house.

The place had taken on again almost its usual aspect of quiet orderliness when, late in the afternoon, a wizened old serving-man, and a broad-shouldered, red-haired, young one rode up to the stable gates. The elder dismounted, and, leaving his horse to the care of his subordinate, asked of the stable-boy where he could find the young mistress. He had, he said, a bit letter to give into her own hands.

Anthony stared at him for a moment without making response,

for the Scot's English was all but unintelligible to his country brain, and the speaker, whose sharp old eyes were fixed on his face, seemed to be very much in earnest. The boy looked from him to Sandy, who sat imperturbably on his big brown horse and viewed Mr. Joseph Ball's stable arrangements with a well-assumed sneer. The only way to repay one's self for being in a country where people spoke some heathen tongue instead of good Gaelic, was to write scorn for all its institutions large on one's own countenance.

"Dunno!" Anthony replied at last, to Hamish's repeated demand. "Who be you, maaster? T'nt every chapper at White House Gate 'll be taken in the parlour to the ladies. Give me your letter and 'll see what 'can do for 'ee!"

This impertinence called forth a torrent of incomprehensible cursing from the old Highlander, and Anthony was constrained to sulkily open the gate and admit him within the precincts.

"Bide here," said the lad, "and'll fetch black William to 'ee! Dam't if 'a won't understand your devil's talk better nor me!"

So he slouched away, and in a few minutes returned and beckoned to Hamish. "You be to coom oop to kitchen door and give your errand respectful to Mr. Lee. He doan't take sauce, I warns 'ee, for all his face's as black as my boots!"

Now Hamish had suffered many shocks since he travelled south with his master, not the least of which had been the bringing home to him of the fact that the McClean was not recognized as a royal personage by the "louping Sassenach" of London Town. He had expected there at least to see bonnets doffed, and respectful glances as his potentate passed by; and bitter were his comments on the customs of the Londoners when he and his understrappers shook their heads and drank sadly the bad whiskey of iniquitous publicans. But no shock he had ever received equalled the one inflicted by the appearance of William Lee, six foot and over, leaning in an attitude of weary majesty against the kitchen door, his black face and white hair shining in the sun, which reflected itself in the discs of his big, gold buttons and the enormous ring on his left hand—a treasure given him by Mary's father for a gallant piece of service long ago.

Hamish jumped back in alarm. He had never beheld a coloured man before, and although he knew that such existed, it was disconcerting to have to face one unwarned, for Anthony's broad speech had conveyed no meaning to his old ears.

Thus they stood face to face, with half a dozen wide flagstones between them, while Anthony looked on, grinning.

William spoke to him first. "Young man, you git back to de

hosses. Dis gen'man wish for to converse with Mr. Lee, an' he's gwine to have it, proper an' private. I ain't no use for you at present."

By sheer personality the old darkie had established an iron rule over the other servants, and Anthony made haste to obey him. When he was gone, William came forward with a flourish and addressed the visitor.

"And what's your pleasure with Mr. Lee, sah?" he said blandly, recognizing at once the status of an old retainer, something so far removed from that of mere hired servants that he had taught the latter to look upon it as beyond their wildest dreams of ambition.

Hamish recovered himself at this evidence of good-will. "It's just a bit letter," he said in his slow, careful English, "that the McClean bade me give your young leddy wi' my ain hands. And it's obliged to you I'll be, Mr. Lee, if you'll bring me to her the noo, if so be she's at hame."

William cocked his head on one side as if pondering the proposition.

"And who did you say de 'pistle was from?" he inquired. "That's a mighty queer name for a gentleman, anyhow."

Hamish drew himself up. "'Tis the finest name in the Hielands," he said proudly, "and if ye don't know that, I'm thinking ye know verra little of the world, Mr. Lee! Ah, black and white, you're all the same in this forsaken country, puir ignorant bodies that canna tell your right hand from your left, when ye suld be doon on your twa knees thankin' God ye had a visit from a grand gentleman like the McClean! Maybe your mistress will have more sense. It's Mistress Mary Ball my master's honouring wi' his correspondence, an' if the leddy's here I'll thank ye to tell her so!"

"Give me the letter," said William shortly, for the colloquy had attracted the attention of the maids, and both Mrs. Price and Nancy appeared in the doorway behind him.

"I'll not!" replied Hamish, stoutly, "'tis frae my hand to hers it goes."

"And a good exchange too!" laughed pert Nancy, stepping out into the sunshine and wiping her hands on her apron. "Come," she said to Hamish, "Mistress Mary's in the parlour, and I'll take you to her if poor Mr. Lee is too busy!"

"You jest mind yur ow business, you idle young baggage," retorted William; but he was beaten on his own ground. "I'll ask Miss Mary to see you," he said to Hamish; "come this way,"

and he led Robin's messenger round to another door, introduced him into a sort of ante-room, and left him while he went to find out his lady's pleasure.

Mary was sitting down, after her day's labour, to write a letter to her brother informing him of the events of the night. Writing was something of a circumstance to her still, and the making of a pen and the laying the white sheet square on the table, with sand and seal to hand, inspired her with something of the awe she used to feel of the Dominie of her school-days, who laboured so patiently to instruct her in the difficult mysteries of spelling and penmanship. Her head bent down, her face set for seriousness, she had just written—

"Dear Brother,—I am in hopes you and Sister Fidelia had a Prosperous Journey and that Susie was a good Girl and Baby did not get Cross in the Coache. Wee had a Most Violent storm in the Night——"

Here the pen became bewitched with a fleck of dust, and a tiny blot appeared on the paper. Before she had remedied the defect the door opened softly and William approached on tiptoe and stood beside her, looking down at her effort with immense admiration. Reading and writing were eternal miracles to him.

"What is it, William?" she asked, glancing up with rather flushed cheeks. Miracles demand stern application in their performing.

"Dre'ful sorry to disturb you, Miss Mary," he said, "but dere's a man come, says he got a letter for you."

"Oh," she cried, jumping up joyfully, "how kind of brother Joseph! Why, I was just writing to him!"

"'Tain't from Mr. Joseph, honey. I ain't seen it, but I judge it's de strange gen'man what come last night. De man seem a decent old man, I mus' say, but he talk de funniest kind o' talk I ever heard. Shall I bring him right in here, Miss Mary?"

"Yes," said Mary, laying down the scissors whose point she had been applying to the blot, "I suppose I had better see him." But all the joyousness was gone from her face.

Hamish was introduced, and silently brought the letter out of a scrap of linen in which he had wrapped it. As he gave it to her he scanned her face narrowly, for he always felt it his business to note all that he could about his master's friends.

"The bonny lass!" he said to himself, as she took the missive from him, somewhat unwillingly, to tell the truth. "No wonder Robin bade me ride fast and bring a fair answer!"

Meanwhile Mary had turned away, and was breaking the

seal after looking at it closely. "I thank you," she said to the servant, as if dismissing him.

"You'll be sending the answer, leddy?" Hamish inquired.

"I will see if one be needed," said she; "William, give this person some refreshment. I will ring when you are wanted."

So William led Hamish away to the buttery, and Mary was left alone with her letter. When the door closed she laid it down on the table and went over to the window where she stood looking out. She felt the greatest repugnance to opening that finely folded square, on which her name was written in characters half an inch high. Why should the man write to her? She had succeeded in forgetting his existence for the last few hours and had no desire to be reminded of him.

"What must be, must!" she sighed; "this is more foolish than I had thought I could be. But I'll not see him again—till brother Joseph comes back, not I!"

Then she spread out her letter, and read it as it lay on the table before her.

"Honoured Madam," it ran, "Not Having had the Opportunity this Morn to thank you for your great kindness, I venture to send This to Speak for one whom gratitude would doubtless render Dumb in your Fair and Gracious Presence. Without your much desired Permission I will not Venture into a Society more fit for Angels than Men, but I humbly pray you to let me know that you are none the Worse for last night's disturbances and alarms, and that your Health is all Your Wellwishers could desire. I do truly long to say many Things, but fear to weary you with my Presumption, therefore will say but this, that in all my Life I did never expect such unmerited Good Fortune as that which was Vouchsafed to me in the Honour of not only becoming known to you, but of also being for some Happy Hours the Recipient of your Sweet Charity. And having said so much, I will e'en find Courage to prefer this Prayer, that when you are entirely Recovered from your Fatigues, You will permit me to Wait upon you at any Time of your Precious convenience, to express if I can do so, the Thanks so poorly Conveyed in this Present. I earnestly Trust that your respected Female relatives have not suffered from the Fright which they must have experienced.

"I am, Madam, Your Humble, Grateful, and Obedient Servant to Command from this Time forth.

"McCLEAN."

Now what answer could the most prudent of maidens despatch to such a missive? Was she to set her hand to a forbidding of the proposed visit? Or should she haste to answer, like Peggy at a fair, "La, Sweet Sir, you confound me, come when you will!"

"Neither, neither," said Mary to herself, pondering, finger on lip. "'Tis clear I'll not see the gentleman till brother Joseph returns, but 'twould be clean unmannerly to tell him so. Nor I'll not write to him neither!" Her intention was so clear that a negative more or less could be forgiven. "Now I know what I'll do," she went on, for, like other people who are not overburdened with counsellors, the wise girl often spoke counsel to herself. "I will send a message—a proper message, neither kind nor unkind, but very polite. What shall I say? That I thank him and I hope he caught no cold nor malair last night—hope? I hope nothing, except not to see him any more! I'll tell no lies—oh dear, I wonder what he'll be saying to brother Joseph about William's old ladies! How shocked Fidelia would be! But this will never do! I am forgetting my message. Oh, I will send it short and stern, the man has no excuse to write to me at all. I will say that I thank him, and that doubtless my brother will be glad to see him when he returns from Oxford! Sure that is more than he deserves, for this letter is an impertinence!"

She went out into the hall and rang her bell—the glass one that Robin had heard in the dark drawing-room the evening before. When Hamish was called in, she gave him the brief message on which she had decided, and then returned to her parlour, closing the door behind her rather sharply. Hamish's face fell. He knew well enough that this was not the answer for which his master had hoped.

"A fair lass, but daft proud," he dubbed her in his mind, and then, after a ceremonious farewell from William, who patronizingly invited him to call again, he rode off with his subordinate, and a heavy heart to keep him company on the way to Lord Herries's cottage at Cookham.

Robin received the short answer in silence. He had expected he knew not what: something more frank and unconventional, he told himself; but in truth he was bitterly disappointed. He had done naught to anger his hostess, he reflected. If in lifting her back from that window last night he had held her one instant to his side, the situation warranted the act as a mere measure for her safety on that slippery floor. Who but a prude would resent being kept on her feet by a friendly

arm? There had been, as he persuaded himself, nothing to tell her what was passing in his own mind. Only the certainty that to yield would be to be banished from her presence for ever, had made him battle down the temptation to rain passionate kisses on her face at that moment, to touch her lips with his own fire. Other men would have called him a fool for foregoing what chance had given him the power to take. Even the girl's nobility and innocence could not call to life the chivalry which, a hundred years earlier, would have forbidden a man to stain his honour by taking advantage of her loneliness. Such things were of England's past.

But fate was preparing to be more kind to him than he deserved. Exaggerated accounts of the storm and its consequences reached Oxford, and Mr. Ball, alarmed at what might have taken place at the low-lying White House, left his wife and the children with Mrs. Lethbridge, and, taking horse, rode home as fast as he could to inspect his property and reassure his sister.

Mary was beginning to find the solitude somewhat depressing, when, to her joy and surprise, Joseph returned on the afternoon of the third day after he had left her. Coming somewhat suddenly into what was called the small parlour, Mr. Ball found his sister at her work-table, surrounded by billows of white linen sheets undergoing the process known to housekeepers as "sides to middle." The girl sprang up and ran towards him impulsively, the work scattering on the floor.

"My dearest brother!" she cried, "how kind and thoughtful you are! This is indeed a pleasure!"

Joseph was many years older than his sister, whom (although he was sincerely attached to her) he persisted in regarding as a being altogether inferior to himself in sense and character. In the first place she was a woman, and women were, in his opinion, unstable and, except when engaged in the sacred duty of ministering to the comfort of man, rather valueless creatures, requiring constant guidance and repression. Mary's character, impulsive on the surface, warm at heart, constant to its loves, and balanced fair and even between duty and humility, inspired him with more anxiety than confidence. Her refusal to enter into the married state to please her relatives, appeared to him something like rebellion; he condoned it by reflecting that this had occurred when she had not the advantage of his own guidance to show her the right road; and in bringing her to England he was sternly resolved that should an opportunity occur of procuring her fitting establishment in matrimony while under his care, it should not be

thrown away. Meanwhile he assumed towards her an attitude of more or less indulgent toleration, tempered occasionally by laboured good advice and semi-parental criticism, all intended to foster those fairest qualities in woman, humility and submission to man.

"My dear Molly," he protested, "although I plead guilty to having taken you by surprise, it is surely not necessary to throw all those things on the floor! What would Fidelia say?"

Mary looked up into his face, undismayed. "Do you really want to know, Joseph?" she asked mischievously. Fidelia had her own ideas on the relative position of wives and husbands. Joseph winced a little. "You asked for it," Mary went on, "so I feel it my duty to reply truthfully. Fidelia would say, 'La, Mr. Ball, go and mind your own business, and I'll take care of mine!'"

"Well, well," Joseph replied, "Fidelia married young, and I have taught her to be a monstrous fine housekeeper, which you'll never be, I fear, having at nineteen no house of your own, my poor, wilful girl! But we will not speak of more serious matters now than the damage done by the flood, news of which, swelled to disaster by common talk, did reach me last night, so that I set out much disturbed, to verify or contradict the same. I am glad to perceive that the damage is less than was reported, but I fear you must have had a most disturbed night, sister?"

"Disturbed?" she retorted, "That I had! Oh, Joseph, I did indeed wish you had been here!" And she told him all the tale, only leaving out one or two minor points which bore not on it.

Joseph's solemn face, with its hooked nose and short-sighted eyes, took on a more and more distressed expression; and when Mary concluded by saying that the visitor had slept in his room, and gone away before she had arisen in the morning, her brother appeared too much annoyed to speak, but rose from where he had been sitting, walked to the window and looked out, drumming on the pane with his fingers.

"I fear you are displeased, Joseph," she ventured to say, and then was silent, thinking it better to let him reflect on the facts.

"I am greatly annoyed," he replied, still with his back to her. Then suddenly turning round, he continued heatedly, "The whole proceeding borders on impropriety, sister! Surely you must see that for yourself!"

Mary flushed to the roots of her hair. "I cannot believe that such a word is intended to apply to my conduct, Joseph. You do

not usually speak without reflection, yet I think a little reflection will show you that I followed the only course open to me."

She was profoundly agitated, for his reproach was as painful as it was unjust but she spoke gently, choosing her words. No personal pain should betray her into a quarrel.

He looked at her, gloomily enough, for a moment; then he realized, in a dull way, that his words had hurt her very deeply. He came back and took her hands in his, and said kindly—

"I did not mean to grieve thee, Molly; I know how good the intention was: but oh, my dear, why was not Price at thy side? I ought not to have gone away. A strange man staying the night, and not a woman in the house! What will he think of us all?"

Mary dimpled into a smile, though the tears were still standing in her eyes. "He thought there were two—old ladies—upstairs," she said. "William told him a shocking untruth, and I had no time to contradict it."

"Thank God!" ejaculated pious, truth-telling Joseph. "You have taken a load off my mind, sister!"

"But it was a story," said Mary, uneasily, "and if he comes again, we must undeceive him, you know." She was shocked in her turn, for Joseph was her living Bible of all the virtues, and she had not dreamed that he would wish to countenance this bold duplicity.

"Leave that to me," replied her brother, hastily. "I will explain if necessary. Will he return, think you, Mary?"

"Oh, I forgot to tell the strangest part of the story," she said; "he is the same that Mr. McClintock wrote to you about, some little time ago, Lord Drumardlee was it not? He wishes to see you, and I have just had this letter from him."

And she picked up McClean's letter from where it lay with the linen on the floor and gave it to him. She was quite bright and happy again now that Joseph had condoned her innocent offence.

Joseph took the letter and read it with an expression which grew more interested and pleased every moment. There was no mistaking the earnest admiration which the young girl had inspired in the writer, who, as he quickly realized, was a man of wealth and position. Perhaps, after all, things might turn out most fortunately. He glanced at his sister, who was now folding up her scattered work, quite unconscious of his scrutiny, and thought what a fair appearance she would make as the wife of such an one.

"What did you answer to this?" he asked, as she turned and met his eyes.

"I told the servant to say that I thanked him, and that doubtless you would be very glad to see him when you returned home."

"A very proper answer, a most proper response," was Joseph's pompous comment.

"I do not like him very much," Mary said, rather timidly. She felt that her brother's sympathy was passing over to McClean, and it disturbed her vaguely.

"It is unwise to judge any one on such short acquaintance," replied Joseph. "McClintock spoke very highly of the gentleman. I will send a letter to him to say I have returned and shall be happy to see him at his convenience. I have a mind to ride over and call on him this evening."

"You must be quite hungry," Mary suddenly declared. "How careless of me not to think of it sooner! I will have something ready for you in a moment!"

And she ran away, and in a short time had an appetizing meal ready for Mr. Ball, after which he felt far too comfortable and lazy to think of riding to Cookham. But he despatched Anthony with a pressing invitation to Lord Drumardlee to honour the White House with his presence at dinner the next day.

CHAPTER IV

ANTHONY was long in finding Hay's Corner, which was the name of Lord Herries's riverside retreat; but Mr. Ball's letter reached Robin in time to change his world from darkness to light, and to keep him leaning out of his window, dreaming of impossible happiness, almost till dawn. This fortunate return and Joseph's cordial invitation seemed to remove all the barriers from his path. Of those which he had left beyond the border he steadily refused to think as barriers at all. His mind was otherwise out of his own control. Since his first boyish passion for Amal—sincere in its way, however debased the object thereof—he had felt nothing to compare with the storm of love, admiration, and delight which had caught him up in the presence of Mary Ball. She was beautiful—he desired that beauty for himself; she was sweet, and pure, and noble—it seemed to him that he acquired virtue in loving her. The circumstances of his so-called marriage, which had been in itself a crime, made the tie, but for his dislike of the unfortunate woman, sit even more lightly on him than on others in that disordered time. He had always felt that he might dissolve it in some high-handed way were he stirred to do so, and perhaps indolence of spirit had as much to do with its continuance as the common humanity which hesitated to deprive a child of its mother's care. He had no definite plans now, and felt that none were needed. There would be time and to spare for all such, later. Let him but secure the gem, and he could trust his own resource and strength to wrench a dull, worthless stone from the setting where this glory should shine. Who could dare to say that young Robin's mother was his father's wife? Had she not been married legally to another man, and carried away by force, by a great band of armed men, shrieking and struggling, from the church door?

Lord Drumardlee would do himself the honour of waiting upon Mr. Ball towards two of the clock, and enclosed Alexander McClintock's letter for his perusal.

Mary received the news of the impending visit with her usual composure, and spent the morning chiefly in the kitchen, overlooking the labours of Mrs. Price, who was so accustomed to Fidelia's commanding eye that she felt lost without a mistress at her elbow, and gladly welcomed Mary as a substitute for Mrs. Ball. When all was in readiness, Mary retired to make her own toilet, and was stopped on the stairs by Joseph, coming down in his best coat, Mechlin ruffles, and smooth tie-wig.

"You will be late, I fear," he said, eyeing her white apron and short skirt with some disapproval. "It is near on time for Lord Drumardlee to arrive."

"I will dress quickly," she replied; "I have but to wash my hands and slip on my dress. 'Twill not take me five minutes."

"Oh, do not hurry too much, my dear," Joseph replied. "I wish you to look your best—and that is something very pretty indeed!"

"Thank you," said Mary, curtsying and laughing, for it was the first time her brother had ever paid her a compliment. Then she ran on to her room, wondering why brother Joseph should be so anxious about her appearance to-day. Perhaps he was afraid that she might not fill Fidelia's place with proper dignity. After all, she reflected, she had seen a good deal more company in Virginia than sister Fidelia could have met in the little house at Oxford. Then she reproved herself for such proud thoughts, and hastened to transform the careful young housewife of the morning into the dainty, fine hostess who should do the honours of her brother's table.

Her best frock—the white one in which Robin had first seen her—was donned; her hair, which she had not yet dressed in the new modes prevailing in the town, was smoothed in the shining rings which her mother had loved; she was thinking honestly of pleasing Joseph when she pinned a red rose in her bosom, clasped her pearls round her neck, and took a last look at her own reflection in the mirror.

"I must have another gown soon," she thought, "sister Fidelia says this one is old-fashioned." Then, without giving herself time to think why it was an effort to do so, she went quickly downstairs to greet her brother's guest.

He had arrived a few moments before, and was standing with Joseph near one of the tall windows of the drawing-room when Mary entered and made her pretty curtsy to the guest. Then she stood silent, for Joseph was speaking.

"Here is my sister Mary, my lord, who has been before me

in the advantage of making your acquaintance. Mary, I have been telling my lord Drumardlee how obliged you were for his assistance during the late storm."

Mary raised her eyes and met those of her admirer. The note of excitement in her brother's voice had struck her, and put her on her guard. She blushed a quick crimson under McClean's openly ardent gaze, but held herself stiffly, and replied with composure.

"Lord Drumardlee was most kind. I trust that he is none the worse for his wetting."

"Indeed, madam," replied Robin, lightly, "there should be no wetting south of the border that could injure a man of my moist country. Heaven has wept over the Highlands for so many centuries that it hath washed away everything but rocks, and heather, and a race that no hardship can kill. Why, when I rode from Edinburgh a short month since, I set out in a snowstorm!"

"You must have been glad to find yourself under gentler skies," said Joseph, seeing that Mary was silent. "We usually experience one violent storm here in the early summer, but I think I can prophecy that the rest of your lordship's visit will be undisturbed by any more unpleasant surprises. May we hope to keep you in the south for some time?"

"I shall not go north again before the autumn, sir," replied Robin, thinking of the matter for the first time, and wishing that Mr. Ball would give his sister a chance to speak. He found, however, that Mistress Mary was no ways anxious to assume the charges of the conversation at dinner, to which they presently sat down. She answered courteously, but briefly, when she was addressed, and dexterously passed on to Joseph the replies to questions put with the object of drawing forth her views on current events. It was, "My brother can tell you that better than I, my lord," and, "My brother says I am too recently come to this country to judge of these matters." And then Joseph, mistaking Robin's desire to hear her voice and to watch the play of her expression for an honest thirst for information, would launch forth into a ponderous exposition of his own points of view on politics and society—subjects which his listener regarded with profound apathy, and on which he was at least as well informed as Mr. Ball.

When the dessert was placed on the table, Mary rose, according to the custom of the time, and retired to the drawing-room, while Robin gloomily resigned himself to at least an hour of solemn intercourse with his host. Even the excellent quality

of Joseph's wine did not reconcile him, but he took the trouble to entertain Mr. Ball with London stories, always dear to suburban ears, and was rewarded by several hearty laughs, whose echoes reached Mary in the long drawing-room, and made her feel rather lonely over her embroidery.

After a spicy tale of the discomfiture of one very lively lady's husband, Joseph ventured to remark, "From your want of sympathy with the poor gentleman, my lord, I take it that you yourself are still free from matrimonial ties?"

Lord Drumardlee raised his eyes, and met Joseph's keen look boldly.

"I am quite free from them—as yet," he said; "but pray do not imagine that I always intend to remain so, or that I personally regard them as anything but very binding and sacred."

"I am glad to hear it," responded the other, with quick relief and a brightening eye. "There is nought so essential to the happiness of reasoning man as a well-trained and affectionate partner! You see, my lord, I speak from experience!" And he beamed at Robin over the top of his glass, and proposed the health of the ladies.

Robin was shrewd enough to perceive the trend of Joseph's thoughts. He put him down as somewhat unwise thus hastily to desire for his sister the attentions of a complete stranger, and realized also that the complacency was accorded merely to his own worldly advantages; but the good man's ambitions fell in too well with his own desires to be made light of, and he promised himself to utilize them to the full.

It was the golden hour of the late May afternoon, and Mary was sitting near one of the windows which stood open to the garden. A day of sunshine had coaxed sweet odours from reviving flowers, and a gentle breeze was playing softly among the trees, whose delicate greenery, all refreshed and vivid, made a beautiful play of light and shade outside the window, and stirred the girl's hair where she sat working pink roses on some creamy silk. She raised her eyes as the two men entered, and Robin thought he had never seen a lovelier picture. She rose, and began to fold up her work, as company manners required; but he hastened forward, and begged her not to put it away.

"It is always easier to talk with a lady who has something more attractive than one's own ugly face to look at," he said, smiling; "and I want you to tell me more of your dear Virginia." Then he sat down on a low chair by her side, resolving that she, and not Joseph, should now be his entertainer.

"But it is not ugly!" protested Mary, looking at him quickly. Then her head went down over the work, and she blushed furiously at having been betrayed into paying him a compliment, though the remark had been made in all simplicity.

"Look again," pleaded Robin, fixing his own eyes on her downcast countenance, quite visible to him from his low seat.

But at that moment the silks became entangled, pink and white and gold threads dancing about, and requiring close attention from blue eyes and slender fingers.

"Let me help you," he said in the elder-brotherly tone she had heard more than once before. And for the next few minutes the dark head and the fair were bent over the shimmering strands in silence.

"But you are making it worse!" she exclaimed, smiling at his efforts. "You have twisted my poor silks into a fine cat's cradle!"

He held them up on his fingers. "Then, lift it off," he said, "and I will show you another figure. 'Twas taught me but the other day in London."

She dropped her worn, silver thimble on her lap, and deftly lifted off the crossed squares, which the next instant he had caught back again in a double St. Andrew's cross held up for her admiration.

"How pretty!" she cried, bending down in smiling approval. "I must learn that for Susie. Who taught you to be so clever?"

Then he told her that it was Molly Lapell, the Princess's Maid of Honour, and amused her with anecdotes of the sprightly young lady—one of the few town beauties whose name was connected with much fun, but unsmirched by scandal.

Mary listened—much interested—and asked a few questions which showed that she was no mere country girl, dazzled at great names. But Joseph, who had wandered into the garden, only too glad to leave Lord Drumardlee to make his court, returned at this moment, and listened uneasily to the conversation. He feared that the man of the world might spoil the good impression already made, by launching upon some less seemly story, such as a London belle would laugh at, but which would appear flippant and revolting in Mary's eyes.

"Will you sing for us, Molly?" he asked. "Perhaps my lord Drumardlee would like some music."

"I only know old songs," she replied; "and he has likely heard fine performers in London."

"Nay," said Robin, "there is nothing so fine as an old song sweetly sung. Pray sing for us, Mistress Mary."

Whereupon she rose, and went to the gilt harpischord that stood in a corner, and sang one old air and then another, ending with a good cavalier ditty that was still a favourite among the loyal folk of Virginia.

Robin sat listening to the sweet music, while the sun sank lower, and sent long, mellow shafts adown the room. The warm air wafted in from the garden, hazy and scented; the birds took up the lay, and seemed to be making it the theme of their evening carol; all was beauty and peace.

Mary rose, and came back towards the window. "I fear I have been committing treason!" she said. "They tell me the new House loves not the names and airs of the old! But 'tis not so across the water. We do not forget."

"Who could forget?" said Robin, looking down at her. "I shall never forget." He was thinking of this golden day—not of the deposed family—as he spoke.

He would not remain to supper, fearing to weary her and lose the ground gained; but he promised Joseph to ride over the next morning and discuss the matter of his proposed investment in Virginia estate.

When Mr. Ball returned to the house, after seeing his guest to the gate, he told Mary of this arrangement.

"I am very glad," she said, "because you will thus have to stay another day at home. But you are losing all the pleasure of your visit to Oxford, brother!"

"I think I shall put off returning to Oxford for a few days," he replied, swelling with some unspoken contentment. "This matter of Lord Drumardlee's is a pressing one, and—well, there be one or two other things that require my attention. He is a very fine gentleman, and speaks with sense and moderation. What dost think of him, Molly?" He could not refrain from trying to make her commit herself to some approbation of the yet undeclared suitor.

"Did you not give me a piece of good advice yesterday, Joseph?" she answered, laughing up at him. "'Tis unwise to judge any one on short acquaintance," says you! See what an obedient pupil I am! I will tell you what I think of Lord Drumardlee when I know him better."

McClellan came back the next day, and the next; never had the laying out of a few thousand pounds required more close attention, more lengthy discussion than the sum which lay in London with the British Linen Bank, awaiting investment. Was Joseph betrayed into delivering an ultimatum, my Lord must take

the night to think it over, and would apprise him of his intentions the following day, if he could so soon arrive at a decision; if, on the contrary, McClean, weary of papers and figures, showed signs of concluding the business, then Joseph, with a paternal smile, would recommend consideration and refuse all responsibility unless Robin decided upon the proposed purchase after calm and solitary deliberation. Nearly a week thus passed away.

In the meantime, Mary's feeling toward Robin had undergone a subtle change; she told herself that she had indeed been mistaken in her first unreasoning aversion from him—that the glances which had seemed too ardent, the letter which had seemed too bold, were mere coin of politeness' realm—forms used belike by every man of the world on this side of the water, and implying no impertinent pursuit of an object held in light respect. Robin had, during these days, made no attempt to see her alone; were they left together by Joseph's studied carelessness, the visitor withdrew a little, spoke more guardedly, exhibited a flattering, sober deference which must allay the alarms of the most squeamish dignity.

In truth, Joseph had learnt enough of the ways of mankind to know that it would be unwise to make things too easy for the coveted suitor, so these occasions were rare; and Robin had sufficient control of his own emotions to subject them to his advantage, and teach the shy bird to trust him ere he raised his hand for its capture.

Therefore the climax, when it came (and nought could avert it now), was the more sudden and disconcerting to the girl—lulled in the happy security of having made in Robin a friend; while Fidelia's absence had strengthened and renewed the love of brother and sister—always a little chilled by the presence of that brother's chosen wife.

And the climax came in this wise, shattering very rudely the artificial paradise which could only have seemed real to a woman as inexperienced, as innately humble as Mary Ball.

It was a week after Joseph's sudden return from Oxford, and the good man was much distraught by a letter received from Fidelia, in which she laid her commands on him to rejoin her at once in order to accompany her and the children back to their home.

"It Amazes me," wrote the decided little lady, "That you have Thought it Requisite to spend so much Time away from your Family, and I can Tell you Mama has gone on Finely, saying

that you Found either her cooking or her Company too Plain for your Taste, and when poor Baby fretted over his big Tooth, which a grandmother Should be accustomed to, She did say very sharp that you Loved not your wife. All which I did bear most Patient, only speaking my Mind once or twice at the most, and then, with Christian Openness, but right meek, remembering her Will is not yet made. Wherefor, my dear Husband, I pray you To Be here by Eight of the Clock on Wednesday morning to Bring us home, and no more at Present, From your Dutiful, loving Wife

“FIDELIA BALL

“*Post Scriptum*.—The Rabbits was Badly jugged; tell Mary that the Carrier charged shameful for bringing The Parcel.”

No wonder that Joseph whistled, and scratched his head, and whistled again, after perusing this letter. The Dutiful Wife was clearly in a bit of a temper, and only instant obedience to her behests would soothe her ruffled feelings; but how, at this stage of an auspicious courtship, could he leave home, break off Lord Drumardlee's visits for two days, and have them resumed under Fidelity's eagle eye? Why, that capable woman would not be in the house half an hour before driving her husband to promise that he would ask the gentleman's intentions, she meanwhile catechising Mary searchingly as to her own, and generally spoiling a very pretty chance of settling the girl in life.

Yet something must be done. The only hope lay in encouraging McClean to propose, and in inducing Mary to accept him, within the next twenty-four hours; this was Monday, and if the weather held good he need not set out for Oxford till Tuesday afternoon. He would arrive there in the dead of night, to ride away again the next morning, and “Mama” would doubtless receive him coldly. But she would soon be brought to forgive his defection if Fidelity's sister-in-law were married to a peer; and, if she chose to remain offended, well, she might, and be demned to her! Her tiny fortune was a matter of small import now that he was a rich man and could provide so well for his family. So a letter was despatched to Fidelity, informing her that he would be with her at the required time; and then he turned his attention to the absorbing and difficult task he had laid out for himself.

Lord Drumardlee came over at midday, in one of his somewhat silent moods. During dinner Joseph noted how his eyes followed Mary's every movement, and how restless and abstracted

he became when she withdrew. Joseph's attempts to draw him to talk of her failed to elicit much response; it was clear that he had no mind to ask her brother for her hand in form as yet, and, stifling some faint scruples of conscience as well as the hesitations of timidity, Joseph decided that the impetus in the right direction must come from himself.

He heaved a deep sigh and dropped a walnut into his wine. Robin watching him, with thoughts far away, suddenly realized that politeness required a comment on these symptoms of melancholy, and said, "I fear you have some anxiety on your mind, sir. I trust you have nothing but good news of Mrs. Ball and the family?"

"I have no bad news, my lord," said Joseph; "but, to tell you the truth, there is a matter on my mind, and one of a sufficiently serious nature to warrant this melancholy, to which, however, I should not give way in the presence of so honourable a guest."

"Pray confide in me," replied Robin, smiling a little at the other's pompous speech. "Maybe I can give counsel—certainly I shall feel sympathy."

"You are too kind," said Mr. Ball; "but alas, I fear the matter is one which is out of my hands. Would it were not! It concerns my sister Molly."

Robin turned pale, and at once fell into the snare. "The young lady's appearance speaks of perfect health and happiness," he said, "and it is not possible that the conduct of one so gentle and good should ever inspire anxiety in her relatives, therefore"—he paused and looked questioningly at Joseph, who sat, his head in his hand, his eyes gloomily fixed on the cloth, resolved that the young man should finish his sentence. Robin cleared his throat and went on—"therefore I can but imagine that this apprehension concerns her future. Has she—your kindness warrants the question—has Mistress Mary bestowed her—affections—where your approval is lacking?"

He leant forward and looked searchingly at Joseph. He cared not a jot what the latter might think of the question. Such a possibility, once suggested, was of such grim importance to him that suspense was unendurable.

But Joseph was touched in his patriarchal pride, and, drawing himself up, answered with some heat, "No indeed, my lord! No female of our family hath ever, so far, transgressed the laws of virtue as to run counter to her guardian's judgment on such a point. It is on a contrary one that my sister has showed herself

somewhat stiffnecked, refusing obstinately to accept the highly suitable offers which would have been gladly sanctioned by me. I do assure you she could have been mistress by now of the finest establishment in Virginia."

"I do not doubt it," replied McClean, looking down in his turn to conceal his relief, "and, if the question be not impertinent, may I ask the reason of her renouncing that honour?"

"That," replied Mr. Ball, nettled at the inflection of sarcasm in his guest's voice, "I cannot explain to you, since I am in ignorance of it myself. I am sometimes inclined to think she has resolved never to marry, yet she hath an example of conjugal happiness ever before her eyes in this very place!"

"She will never find one worthy of her," said Robin, low and ardently. Then he realized that Joseph's melancholy had vanished, and that he was leaning forward with an expectant smile, ready to receive the application for his sister's hand which should follow this declaration of feeling.

But McClean had now no mind to be led to Mary as a humble suppliant, his suit supported by brotherly authority, only to be refused as his predecessors had been, perhaps for that very reason. If he knew anything of a proud girl's heart, he judged that it should be won silently before being claimed publicly. Joseph was still looking at him encouragingly and questioningly. The situation must be broken up by any means. A quick and apparently careless movement of Robin's hand sent a glass of wine over on the table, and in an instant he had pushed back his chair and was on his feet, offering profuse apologies for his clumsiness. William, who must have been very near the door, hurried in, napkin in hand, to repair the small disaster, and Mr. Ball suggested that they should finish their bottle and smoke a pipe under the great chestnut tree on the lawn.

They were presently joined by Mary, who came out of the house and across the green turf towards them, looking like a rose in bloom. Her dress, of faint pink and white, shimmered softly in the sunshine which found its home in her hair, in her eyes; there was a gentle stateliness in her movements which made her seem the fitting queen of her lovely surroundings; and, as she paused beside Joseph's chair and laid a hand on his shoulder, asking if they had all they required, McClean felt a pang of envy at the good fortune of the dull brother, unmoved by the girl's caress or the loving note in her voice. Would such ever be for him?

"Will you not stay with us?" Robin asked, rising from his

place on the bench that ran round the tree's broad girth. "Surely the sunshine here gives a better light for your embroidery than you can find indoors!"

"'Tis but early in the day for mere embroidery," she answered, raising her eyes and meeting his above Joseph's head. "Were I a good housewife you should not see me again till sundown, for there is a meadow full of Fidelia's best linen to gather in and sort for the pressing, and Price, zealous to show she hath not been idling in the mistress's absence, is half drowned in strawberry preserves, and swears no laundry-maid shall set foot in the kitchen till the jam hath cleared! It takes all the sense the poor wenches have not got to keep them from tying her down in her chair and putting their irons on the fire instead of her saucepans. Oh 'tis a weary world, my masters," and she laughed happily.

"Mrs. Ball will soon return, I hear," said Robin, "and then your labours will be lightened, Mistress Mary, and you will give us useless creatures a little more of your amiable society." For Mary had been chary of her presence lately, thinking that two such clever men must have much to say to one another which she could not understand; and she was also sensitively anxious that Fidelia should not reproach her with any remissness in her stewardship.

But Joseph had by this time resolved on his plan of campaign. There was no time to lose, and he must e'en be rash and leave the field free to Drumardlee for an hour or two, trusting to the helpful goddess, Opportunity, to bring things so far forward that his consent to a betrothal should be asked before bedtime.

"Take a holiday, child," he said, rising suddenly, so that a chestnut bough brushed a little cloud of powder out of his hair. "Price will have her way, never fear, and do you sit here and entertain Lord Drumardlee while I ride over to the farm and see what Barton is doing to the new barn." The farm was a small piece of property which belonged to the White House, and Joseph, like many another rich man, thought he knew more of how crops and cattle should be managed than the wise yokels who tilled it for him.

"Shall you be long gone, brother?" Mary asked. "I fear Lord Drumardlee will find it dull work talking to me while you are away." She was not over-pleased to be left alone for a couple of hours with Joseph's guest, and something of her first timidity in his regard made itself felt at such a prospect.

Joseph hastened to reassure her. "I shall be back long before sundown," he said; "but, in any case, Molly, you must not

keep my lord waiting for his supper! If the mare go lame it will but add to my mistress to know that he is going hungry." And he laughed at his own joke.

Robin was overjoyed. He was beginning to grow heartily weary of Mr. Ball's society, and the thought of a long summer evening spent alone with Mary in the sweet, silent garden promised paradise to him.

He drew the chair and a small table further under the shade of the tree, and when Mary went indoors to fetch the pretty work whose forwarding was as much a part of each day's duty as saying her prayers and reading her Bible, he sat down on the bench and looked up into the green, fluttering canopy overhead with a sense of joyous triumph, unfelt till now, when at last his hour had come. Surely she would let him tell her to-day, and if she answered not in words, 'twould be because those lovely lips were better employed!

The sun went down, and Joseph did not return. Robin and Mary sat under the chestnut tree till she could no longer see to work. Then the embroidery was folded away, and they walked up and down the fragrant garden paths, between the clipped hedges that were full of filmy veils of dew, out on the soft turf, where Mary's dress made a little clipping noise and gathered a fringe of moist leaf and grass blade to its trimming, for she forgot to hold it up, and for once was unconscious of all things but the supreme charm of the hour. Never had time gone for her so quickly. The clear twilight made all things cool and sweet, and enfolded her in a witchery of tender peace. Robin had talked as he never talked before, telling her strange stories of the north, legends of love and mystery and terror; and then speaking of himself, laying at her feet, as it were, the history of his soul, with all its dreams and longings, its passionate leapings up to beauty and hope of all things good, and its lonely sinkings back to despair when hope departed and left him, seared and sorrowful, and incapable of compassing the heights alone. Still he came back to that theme of his utter solitude in life, of the long fruitless past and unshared future, speaking with all the fire of his Celtic blood, and stirring the depths of the girl's heart with a tender pity that was near akin to love. As he spoke, he felt that his truest self was in every word. He was showing her the man he could have been—the man he would be, for her, and the intensity of his emotion was not weakened by a single tremor of doubt or self-reproach.

In his own mind all lay clear behind him, from the winter night when Divine Pity sent the first dim, ghostly admonition to rouse him from his lethargy, to this moment, when, led by a thousand invisible guidings, he found himself pacing between the flowers in the warm twilight, beside the fairest and purest of God's creatures. Her eyes looked into his, dewy with tender sympathy, that precious balm which women give so lavishly (dear spendthrifts that they are), and whose poignant sweetness so intoxicates the giver that she knows it not from love.

But of love no word was spoken yet, though every note of the man's voice rang with it, every look of his dark eyes burned with it; though he trembled when her dress brushed against him, and turned dizzy when for one instant her hand rested on his arm. And she, borne along on that whirlwind of silent passion, felt the thrill of the hour and the man, bent towards him in unspoken acquiescence, and answered faint and low because the innocent heart of her was responding to a call unheard till now.

They had reached the terrace which bordered the garden at the water's edge. Running along the whole width with a fretted stone railing, it sank down at one end in three shallow steps to the little landing place where a boat lay moored. The river flowed smoothly past, lapping and gurgling with a low, musical sound, and reflecting stretches of pale sky, where a few stars were growing in lustre as night approached. Mary leaned over the balustrade and wondered why the world seemed so fair to-day. Robin stood looking down on her, praying the darkness to hold its skirts away, that he might see a little longer the golden head and slender neck, the unringed hand on the grey stone, the gracious lines of the young figure in its sheeny robe.

There was a sound of oars on the river. Suddenly Robin felt that his mastery of himself was gone. With a stifled cry he threw himself down beside her, catching at her hand, holding it to his lips, his cheek, kissing the folds of her dress, calling out upon his angel love to take pity on him who could bear no more, vowing she should be his for all eternity.

She would have broken from him, but she could not. Then the moment took its toll. She ceased to struggle, she looked down into his face; and as he knelt, clinging to her robe, she slowly, slowly bent her golden head. The next instant her lips would have been laid upon his brow.

She had not heard the barge grating against the distant steps. There was a rush of feet on the terrace, a crowd closed in around

her, laughing men, flushed, bare-bosomed women. One made a dash at Robin from behind, and covered his eyes with her two hands.

"Tracked at last, my lord Drumardlee!" screamed the Honourable Evelina Mulcaster; "Demme, where's the lady away so fast? Ain't she proud of her conquest?"

The court was in villeggiature at Richmond, and the maids of honour had been enjoying a picnic on the river. The goddess Opportunity had done more than was asked of her.

CHAPTER V

M^CCLEAN found himself alone on the terrace, and began to realize what had happened. The bacchanalian company had fled from his face and his curses, and were tumbling helter-skelter into the barge, which at once put off and shot into mid-stream, whence the sounds of very faint-hearted laughter came to his ears. The pretty joke was of Evelina's inventing ; her sharp eyes had recognized Robin, whose sudden disappearance from court, unexplained by Herries's absent-minded untruths, had piqued both her curiosity and her vanity. Some word had led her to suspect that he was at Hay's Corner, a spot where Herries (away in town to-day) had once offered a rural entertainment to his fashionable friends, and she was resolved to draw that cover for James's missing cousin ; but ere reaching it she caught a glimpse of him on the terrace of the White House. A whispered order had brought the barge quickly to the steps, and then the whole party, sufficiently excited for any wild freak, had burst in with half-tipsy shrieks and laughter to desecrate the crowning moment of a man's life. Robin wondered that he had not killed some one.

With one more fierce invective hurled after the retreating barge and its load of fools, he turned away from the river, and came quickly towards the house, seeking for Mary. At the door he met Joseph, hot and dusty, and looking as if he had ridden much further than Barton's farm. Joseph drew Robin into the dining-room.

"I do most humbly crave your pardon for thus deserting you, my lord," he began, "there was a monstrous number of things to see to ; but what is the matter ? You look disturbed—very much disturbed !"

"I am," said Robin ; "and I pray you, let me to your sister. There is a thing—something has occurred which I must explain this moment !"

"Softly, softly," said Joseph, standing up pretty square before

the imperious young man. He had given him the whole afternoon in which to explain his views to Mary, and in her brother's estimation the time had come when the matter should be submitted to him. "Will you tell me what it is that so preoccupies you? If my sister have not already retired to rest, I will take her a message from you."

But it was not easy to thwart McClean in his present mood. "My dear sir," he replied, with a good deal of heat. "The matter is one entirely between the young lady and myself. She will not thank a third person for blundering in between us. It is imperative that I have a word with her at once!"

Now, Lord Drumardlee had made a mistake. In addressing Joseph thus haughtily he had before his mind the Joseph of the last few days, the patient business man of no great social standing, only too pleased to receive a peer, only too openly eager to secure a great match for his sister. Robin now found himself facing a big, angry gentleman of the proudest colony in the world.

"'Blundering'—between you and my sister?" thundered Mary's brother, coming very close to the aggressor and looking him in the eyes. "Upon my sacred honour, my lord, you mistake your position very strangely! I'd have you know that 'imperative' is no word to use neither! No orders are issued here except by me, and that which you have to say to my sister shall be said to me first, or not at all. Imperative, indeed! Demme, no one ever used that word to me in my own house, nor shall!"

"And upon my sacred honour, Mr. Ball," replied Robin, returning the other's gaze with a furious stare, "that which I would and shall say to Mistress Mary before I leave this place, I say to her, and take her answer to it too! D—n it all, my good man, I can't ask you to marry me, can I?"

"You'll get no answer but mine to that question, 'my good man,'" was Joseph's retort, "nor you'll not put it to my sister without my consent. Come," he went on more calmly, as reflection resumed its sway, and he realized that, after all, the man was hot in love, and that to be too hard with him would imperil the outcome of the situation, "sit down and compose yourself, and let us talk like reasoning beings. You have used words as little to my liking as those in which I replied did suit yours. Shall we withdraw them ere discussing other things?"

Robin bowed gravely, and after a moment, held out his hand. He, too, had recovered his self-control, such as it was, and sorely shaken by the occurrences of the evening.

"Mr. Ball," he said, as Joseph took the proffered hand, "you are within your rights. I have the honour to ask your consent to my—marriage with your sister?"

"The honour is mine," said Joseph, calling up the grand manner due on such an important occasion. "You will forgive me, my lord, if, before giving my unqualified consent, I ask you once more to condescend to explain the cause of your haste and evident excitement of a few minutes since. My sister is very dear to me." This last was said with such honest affection and dignity that McClean felt bound to yield.

"Very well," he answered, "you shall have it. This evening I so far lost command of my feelings as to tell Mary that I—I loved her." He was silent for a moment. Recollection was choking him. "She—she had not answered me when a rout of the court people, whom I met in London, saw fit to break in upon our interview."

Joseph was looking at him in incredulous surprise. Robin went on impatiently—

"They landed from their boat—Mary fled to the house. I must have her answer," he cried suddenly, "they frightened her; I know not what she may be thinking! Don't keep me on the rack, friend; don't you understand—I *must* see her to-night!"

Joseph rose and paced the room. "What should she be thinking?" he said at last. "The interruption may have startled her, but it was not of your making. In any case she would consult me before replying to your addresses." Robin was silent, and Joseph resumed uneasily, "I take it she did not reply?"

"She did not," answered McClean, very sharply.

"Now, I will do this, my lord," said Joseph, coming to a standstill before his man; "I will go to her now, and will tell her that you ask for an answer, if she can so soon give one, and that if it be in the affirmative my authority will not be used to dispute it. But that is all I can do, and I very much doubt whether she will come to any decision so rapidly. Were I in your place——" and he hesitated.

"What would you do?" asked Robin, with a gleam of humour in his eyes. The picture of Joseph in wild pursuit of the object of his well-ordered affections was rather a funny one.

"I would go quietly home," was Joseph's answer. "Give her till to-morrow to consider, and then return for what is far more likely to be a favourable reply than any she would give at this moment."

"You would do that?" said Robin. "Yes, I suppose you would, but I cannot. Why, I should cut my throat on the road! Come, Ball, be a good fellow, and go to her now. Tell her, explain, authorize—do any d——d thing you can think of to help me—but for God's sake bring her down and take me out of hell to-night!"

Thus adjured, Joseph yielded. He went straight to Mary's room. The door was locked, and it was not until he had tapped sharply more than once that he heard her move across the floor to open to him. When she did, slowly and unwillingly, the room was unlighted behind her save for the dim square of window where the stars were shining and the honeysuckle swaying in the breeze. Joseph could not see her face, and she did not speak, but he divined that she was profoundly agitated.

"May I come in?" he asked, for she made no movement, but stood mute in the doorway. "I have something to say to you, Molly. Perhaps you can guess what it is?"

She turned and walked away from him to the window, where she stood, silent, while he entered and closed the door behind him. She was looking out, letting the evening breeze touch her hot brow with its grateful coolness.

Joseph approached her. "My dear sister," he began, "Lord Drumardlee informs me that he seeks the honour of your hand, and that, somewhat against the rules of propriety, he has told you of his desire before making me aware of it——"

"Well?" said the girl, in a hard, even voice, "go on, brother. He had doubtless more to tell you than that."

Joseph was taken aback. "My dear child," he continued, in the instructor's tone which was habitual to him; "you take this matter with an assurance which hardly sits well on a genteel young woman! Lord Drumardlee is paying you a very high compliment, and it should be received with a little more gratitude and humility!"

Then Mary spoke indeed. Turning upon her brother with flashing eyes, she cried—

"Gratitude! humility! Do you know what he did? He threw himself at my feet, he caught at my dress—and his friends were there, then—he must have known it. They surrounded us! Oh, I shall never forget the men's laughter—the women's faces! That creature had her hands on his eyes—and he dares to ask *me* to marry him!"

Her voice broke, and the poor girl leaned her head against the side of the window and wept.

Joseph was shocked, and also filled with self-reproach. The catastrophe had been of his making. Doubtless the lover had seen no reason for restraint when the field had been so openly left free for him. But, more than by all this, Joseph was moved now by the fear that scandal might busy itself with his sister's name. So he blundered fearlessly into the worst error he could commit.

"If that be so, Molly," he began, "if Lord Drumardlee's friends have thus seen you together (and indeed he expected them as little as you) there is all the more reason why you should now consider his serious addresses! Your betrothal to him would silence any unfortunate reports which may be set afloat concerning your acquaintance."

Mary raised her head and looked at Joseph, as if to convince herself that his words indeed applied to herself. Then all her colour died down, and her face looked ashy white in the summer starlight. There was a moment's silence, and then she spoke.

"Will you do me the kindness to leave me alone now, Joseph? I do assure you I can bear no more."

"But Drumardlee?" insisted Joseph, mistaking her hard-won self-control for the sign of imminent capitulation, "he begged me to come to you, to bring him your answer. Come, child, it is the best thing! Do you not wish to make us all happy? Even old brother Joseph who loves you so much?" And he put his arm round her, remembering how she had often yielded to his kindness, when his lectures had only roused her to opposition.

But Mary was in no yielding mood to-night. She moved away from the brotherly arm, and said, coldly, "If you love me, brother, never speak to me of this man again. That is my last word."

He saw that it was hopeless to insist. To-morrow would bring counsel, perhaps. When he left her, she sank down in her place, and laid her head on the window sill, and cried bitterly.

Joseph went slowly downstairs to the dining-room, lighted now, by William's care, with a couple of wax candles. McClean was walking up and down the room, and came to a sudden halt as Joseph entered. There he stood, at the opposite side of the table, between the two tall lights, his white face heavily framed in his long dark hair, his eyes compelling truth from the unwilling messenger.

"'Tis out of the question to get reason from her now," Mr. Ball began, "the maid is so flustered, so agitated—so flattered, my lord——"

Robin broke in with a cry, "She has refused me!" And he flung himself down in a chair, his head on his hands, his face hidden.

Joseph looked at him for a moment. Then he walked round the table, and laid a hand kindly on the man's shoulder.

"It seems to me," he said, looking down at the bowed head, "that you are a couple of excitable children who have both had a fright and blame each other for it. You transgressed somewhat the ahem—usual rules of propriety, my lord, in so hastily declaring yourself to the young lady before obtaining the consent of her guardians to your addresses——"

Robin looked up in his face and burst into a harsh laugh. "Then what the devil did you leave me alone with her for?" he cried. "What did you expect? She is a dream of beauty and sweetness—any man not made of stone would have lost his head and acted as I did!"

"I was detained by the most unforeseen accident!" returned Joseph, getting very red. "And since your impetuosity betrayed her into a sort of publicity—and that, I take it, is what she now resents—you must e'en bear the consequences. I can tell you I am no way pleased, my lord, to think that your fashionable friends should have seen her alone with you to-day. Such persons put no bridle on their tongues! No wonder the poor maid is all confused and disconcerted. To-morrow, when she is herself again——"

"Will you promise that I shall see her to-morrow?" asked Robin, standing up suddenly. "Ah, you cannot! She has banished me! I see it in your face!"

"You shall see her to-morrow," said Joseph, steadily, for to such obedience he felt he could coerce his sister; "but unless you will go quietly home now, my lord, and let a tired man get to his bed, you will not deserve the favourable reception which I trust, awaits you."

And with that he got McClean to horse and sent him off, Hamish at his heels, to Cookham, for by no stress of hospitality would he be persuaded to permit Robin to stay the night at the White House, now that he was known to be a visitor there. When at last all was quiet, poor Joseph sank into a deep chair, and as William pulled off his boots, asked himself why men were made on such different patterns by a Creator who might have

limited the species to the reasoning and the wise. There had been no such pother as this when he had gone a-courting his Fidelia!

Tired as he was, he sprang up as her name recalled his sacred obligations to be in Oxford by eight o'clock on Wednesday morning! What if McClean, who had mentioned no hour for his visit, should choose to pay it, conventionally, in the afternoon? Joseph all but cursed his own stupidity for not specifying the moment when Mary's admirer was to be received. As far as Mary was concerned, the later in the day the better, for thus would reflection have more time to do its work; but, for Joseph himself, the prospect of waiting in cold anxiety till the late afternoon, and then riding in hot and unhealthy haste half through the night, was one of acute discomfort. However, there was nothing to be done but await my lord's convenience, which fortunately was not likely to be over-tempered with discretion. To send a messenger to hasten him would be to show a very undignified eagerness for his alliance. Nor would Joseph willingly let him know of his own enforced absence. The man was too reckless, too masterful—Joseph had almost added, too selfish, to be left free to annoy Mary again. Who could say what he would do? Joseph felt a distinct fear of the passionate, daring personality, which nevertheless he proposed to entrust with his sister's happiness; he had never met any one quite like Lord Drumardlee before, and speculated on his probable conduct much as he might have wondered which way a wild, unbroken colt would jump.

"But Mary will cure all that," he told himself for his comfort. "She is shaken and frightened to-night, and knows not what she says; but I am certain she likes the man, and there never lived a wiser, sweeter maid. She will make a good wife to him that gets her!"

That was such a self-evident truth that it served as a nightcap to his distressed imaginings, and he slept sound long before Mary had ceased weeping by her window.

She, too, at last rose up, reproaching herself for having given way so far to her stormy emotions. Unsteadily, with wet cheeks and little recurrent sobs, she set herself to saying her evening prayers, then to smoothing her hair and laying by her garments. When all was done, she stood one moment by the open window, looking out to the star-sprent sky, to the odorous, half-seen garden, to the belt of trees which hid the fast-flowing river. That brought back remembrance, sick and plain. She shuddered with the weariness of spent agitation.

"It is not of Thee, my God, and it has come very close to me! Be Thou my strength—I am alone, and I am afraid!"

But the prayer brought not the peace that had followed it a week earlier. Had a breath dimmed the crystal purity of her intention? She slept, at last; but her pillow was wet.

Now, for the first time in his life, Robin McClean held back from the thing that he desired. He felt fear—not the honest, humble diffidence of the lover who calls himself unworthy of his goddess—but grim, stark fear that Mary would say him nay. If she should—he knew that he might rave himself mad at her feet, swear to slay himself before her eyes, and she would not alter her verdict. With the sad and certain knowledge that comes to such men as Robin, he knew that he must not deceive himself into believing that her faltering for an instant, in the first contact of his passion, meant that the heart of her was his. The best, fairest, holiest woman would cease to be all that, were she not human too; but that thrill of the first awakening would never master this girl again. Never again, but of her own free will and from her assured sovereignty, would she bend down her face to his, would she let him so much as touch the hem of her garment. Had the moment not turned to his defeat, had Time—greybeard thief and cheat—not robbed him of the next—he believed he could have held her to his heart till hers was aflame, kissed her lips till she must dream of him till her dying day.

Now he must approach her on far other ground. The matter had assumed the aspect of a family affair, an authorized courtship, and it would be laid on him to prove himself strong, calm, constant—worthy of her heart by verdict of her judgment. How? Robin felt faint and weak at the prospect of the task. She had known him but a few days; he had no splendid history of past achievements and present virtues to unroll before her dazzled eyes. The trifles of rank and wealth which weighed so heavily with her brother would not even tell in the balance when she held the scales. No sudden opportunity for splendid heroism such as would kindle a woman's admiration would be granted him; scarcely did he desire it, for he never had called himself a hero, though he knew that physical courage and certain traditions of brutality would always carry him safely through a difficult moment. The end of the long, disheartening calculation was inevitably this: had he anything to offer worth Mary Ball's acceptance?

Then a creaking clock in the stables rang out three, and he

himself, for her eyes were heavy, her cheeks pale, her usually proud, gay bearing turned to dejection and fatigue.

"This will never do, Molly!" he exclaimed, now hoping that McClean would keep away until she was more like herself. "Come out into the garden; you need fresh air to drive off these megrims!"

And putting his arm through hers, he led her out over the smooth turf to the seat under the chestnut tree.

It was a divine morning, fresh as spring though warm with summer. Every sound seemed to reach the ear through some exquisite medium which turned the twittering of the birds, the distant lowing of the cattle, the gardener's scythe in the grass swathes, the stream's soft ripple past the stones, into the delicate tinkling music of a pastoral harmony. The youth of the year and the day was on everything, from the unspoilt green of leaves against the sun, to the deep, new crimson of the expanding rose. And the air was like wine dancing in light.

Mary raised her head and breathed deep, and felt her life come back to her. Night seemed gone forever in this holy honesty of day.

"Ah," said Joseph, standing before her and looking down into her face as she sat on the bench under the tree, "that is better! Your roses are coming back finely, Miss, and I am a good doctor. We must have no headaches to-day, sister, for there are matters of great import to be considered! Also," he added, appealing to woman's supposed vanity, "I would not have those who found you so fair yesterday rub their eyes and ask themselves if the pale, mumpish maid I met but now is really Mary Ball, known erstwhile as the Rose of Epping Forest!"

"Ah, the dear time!" said Mary, with a sigh of regret; "would I were back in Virginia! Oh but I am not ungrateful," she added quickly, seeing the look of disappointment in her brother's face, "do not think that! I know—I appreciate so much all you do for me, Joseph, and I have been most happy and contented with you and the children and Fidelia. But to-day things seem changed—it is doubtless my own fault—and I felt homesick for a moment."

Joseph sat down beside her, looking unusually wise. "It is not for Virginia that you are homesick, my dear," he declared, "but for a home of your own, as every sensible girl is, if she reach your age without having one!"

"I suppose nineteen is very old," Mary replied, stooping to gather a blue forget-me-not that came peeping out from the lush

grass under the bench. "But I cannot help it," she went on, looking down into the flower's bright eye, "I cannot put the clock back three or four years, can I? There is no contradicting the family Bible!" and she smiled again her bright, happy smile as she turned and found Joseph's eyes fixed upon her face. He was too preoccupied to stop to reassure her on the score of her fresh youth. All his mind was busy seeking to bring her back to the subject in hand.

"For a man who is over thirty," he began, rubbing his chin, "it is hardly advisable to select a girl of fifteen or sixteen for his bride. In age, as in tastes and character, there should be a kind of harmony between man and wife. Now, I consider that Lord Drumardlee must be at least two and thirty."

"Oh," Mary remarked. Then she went on, rather dryly, "And will you please tell me, Joseph, what harmony you perceive between his tastes and character and my own?"

This gave Joseph his opportunity. Dividing the subject into heads, as it had been a sermon, he discoursed on Robin as if he had known him all his life, discovering in the uncertain, undisciplined Highlander many sterling qualities which the latter had never suspected in himself.

More women have been lost by good instincts than by base ones. But Mary knew there was another traitor in the camp. The nameless power which she felt "was not of God," had all but mastered her for one perilous moment; it had sapped her will, silenced her judgment, had sung such wild music in her ears that her world swam round her as in a dream of light. The sweet young blood had leapt at its call, and for the first time in her life she had passed out of her own control. She could never become another man's wife without telling him of it, as of something robbed from his kingdom before he came—therefore was she not already bound by the invisible chains of her delicate honour and purity to the man who would have no need to be told thereof?

Ah, Robin would have no need to be told; and the memory of what he must have seen in her eyes yesterday brought a flood of crimson to her cheeks to-day, so that she turned away from Joseph's glance and let the stream of his insistence fall on heedless ears, as she looked across the garden in the flush of the summer's morning, taking counsel with herself. If she refused to see her suitor again, would he not have the right to call her fickle, light, a coquette? Mary felt that she would rather renounce life in this hour than merit such horrible epithets. Yet, if she saw him, if she let him pour out his passionate pleading for her love again,

how could she tell that again she might not fail to overcome the subtle, potent spell that had conquered her once?

Ah, this was not love, not the holy reverence, the thankful trust, the strong upholding of two hearts to God for the sanction and the joy of His blessing. If pity cried on her and she replied, if passion claimed her and she wavered, at least these underlings should not profane love's name! Better a bitter memory, better an accepted humiliation, than that crime.

Joseph had ceased to speak, and she became conscious that he was waiting for her answer. She turned and met his eyes bravely.

"I do consent," she said slowly, "to see Lord Drumardlee once more. What I will say to him I cannot tell you now, brother, but this one condition I will make, that you be by my side when he cometh."

"Of course, my love, of course," replied Joseph, overjoyed at her apparent submission. "That is but right and fitting. You are too sensible a girl not to see your duty now that I have stated it so plain. Ah, I knew I could count on my little Molly. God bless you, child."

"Do not say that yet," she replied hastily. "I promise nothing, and I think you will likely be very much displeased and disappointed when all is said. But I purpose to do right, and I hope you will remember that."

"If you do right, Molly," was his rejoinder, "you will accept this marriage, the advantages of which I have so clearly pointed out. Of course a young woman does not wish to appear too hasty in yielding to any man's suit. Such sentiments are very proper, very modest, and I highly approve of them. But they must not carry you too far. Now run indoors if you will, and I will first see the young man when he comes. Good luck send him early, for I am due in Oxford to-night."

Mary rose and moved away, feeling inwardly lonely and unsupported; but there was no use in attempting to explain matters further to dear Joseph.

He called after her, "Molly, Molly, my dear, I think perhaps it will be better that you do not say anything to Lord Drumardlee about my so soon departing again,"

"Very well, brother," she replied, then she went indoors. Men were strange creatures, she thought. Was it likely that in a few hours she would be gossiping with her disturbing suitor about Joseph's family arrangements? When she should have said her say, she thought it very improbable that they would ever interest Lord Drumardlee again.

She had in a manner exonerated him from complicity in yesterday's invasion. No doubt could be entertained as to his being very much in earnest, and such an interruption must have been as little to his taste as hers. But it had done him lasting harm in her eyes. Were such people his friends? What manner of man must he really be, she asked herself, if persons of that stamp could venture on such familiarities with him?

Long hours passed by. Mary went about her accustomed occupations, and at every turn some new aspect of the situation presented itself to her mind. When the afternoon calm settled down over the White House and its other occupants, the poor girl was still torn with doubt as to her course, and felt but one strong desire, that of running away and avoiding altogether the impending interview. When three o'clock struck and Robin had not appeared, she began to hope that he might have already renounced the quest; and although feeling, in spite of her real humility, some natural pique at his apparent indifference, she laughed this away, and began to recover her usual cheerful calm.

Joseph, on the contrary, was working himself into a storm of irritated anxiety. Would Lord Drumardlee ever come?

CHAPTER VI

JOSEPH'S demeanour was perfect. To Robin's quick questioning he replied with a mixture of gravity and encouragement, which conveyed the impression that he had done all that he thought wise and proper in the matter, and that the outcome now rested with the young man himself. Were he worthy to win her, Mary would doubtless accept him ; Joseph's bows and silences seemed to say this so clearly, that no responsibility could be made to attach itself to him after the event, and Lord Drumardlee would be obliged to exonerate him from all blame should the final decision be an adverse one.

Mary had heard the sound of horses' hoofs, and understood that the moment had come when she must speak her mind. With it came the needed light, strong and clear and sudden. Her doubts and indecisions fell away for the instant, and she felt sure just then that whatever lay before her, Heaven had no mind to make her Robin's wife.

"Brother," she said, when Joseph stood before her, holding out his hand to lead her downstairs, "you would do the kinder thing by taking my message. I will not marry Lord Drumardlee."

"I am sorry to hear you say that, Molly," he replied gently ; "but the nature of your decision does not alter the fact that you have promised me that he should hear it from your own lips. Let us go down to him."

So they went down in silence.

Robin was standing by the table with his face towards them ; he had been watching for the closed door to open. He made a step forward and then stood still, forgetting customary greetings, his eyes fixed on Mary's countenance.

She was very grave, and returned his look without blushes or tremors. He knew that he was refused. He turned away and walked over to the window, speechless.

Then he heard Mary's voice. She was speaking gently yet with great clearness.

"It grieves me, my lord, to appear indifferent to the honour you have offered me. I should thank you for it, and I do. I cannot do more."

Then there was silence for a moment.

Robin turned, crossed the room, and stood before her. Only one word came to his lips.

"Why?" he asked huskily.

Joseph withdrew a little, and turned his back on the two.

"Why?" Robin asked again, holding out his hands, and showing grievous pain in his face.

Mary shrunk back a step. "Perhaps you know why," she replied; "I do not. But I cannot marry you." The last two words seemed difficult to say.

Then Robin thought he understood; that some whisper from Castle Duart had reached her. She, too modest to seek explanation, too confiding to misbelieve, had condemned him because of Jean.

"As you and I live, madam," he said—"as God lives, if that says more to you—there is no reason why you should not marry me. Oh, my dear," he cried, in sudden despairing tenderness, "never in this world will any man love you as I do! The heart of me is under your feet! Mary, Mary, come to me!"

Was the spell to work again? She turned red, then pale. He came a step nearer. He had forgotten they were not alone. He held out his arms to her, and she trembled for an instant. Then some strange, divine air intervened, and gave her strength. She turned from him, as if led by invisible hands, and left the room.

An hour later Joseph was riding hard for Oxford, and deep quiet reigned in the great house by the river.

When Fidelia and the children returned, late the next day, all very cross and tired, Mary had to take much criticism on her regency; also various covert attacks on the supposed sisterly jealousy which had persuaded Joseph to remain at home instead of paying his devoirs to his mother-in-law. The affair which had really detained him having reached no successful issue, he had no mind to give any account of it to his affectionate partner. He did not allude to it again in conversation with Mary, but both he and she hoped that Fidelia would remain in ignorance of Lord Drumardlee's offer. Mary was exceedingly grateful to Joseph for his reticence on the subject towards herself. When she saw the

disappointed expression which had come over his jolly face, when she realized how much he had built on the hopes of this marriage for her, she was doubly touched at the patience and kindness which made him refrain from anything like an expressed reproach or regret.

"Dear, kind brother," she said to him suddenly one day, when they had both suffered somewhat from Fidelia's strictures, and she found Joseph smoking despondently under the chestnut tree, "there is nobody like you in the world, and I shall never meet one I love half so much!"

And then, as he looked up at her, flushed with pleasure at the spontaneous declaration, she threw her arms round his neck, pipe notwithstanding, and kissed him, at the imminent risk of setting her hair alight.

"Well, Molly," he said, when he was liberated, "I could almost say as much to you—but only out here, you know. It would never do in yonder!" And he nodded towards the house, where an outbreak of window-cleaning was going on under Mrs. Ball's energetic direction. So the old confidence between brother and sister was established anew.

Joseph had utilized the week's intercourse to establish with Robin McClean a certain business connection, which would, he hoped, serve as a tie by which to renew relations with him in the future. Robin had ended by commanding Joseph to employ a large part of the capital at his disposal in the acquisition of land in Virginia, and various preliminary papers had been signed anent an estate which Joseph had been requested by a colonial land-owner to dispose of to advantage. The final transfer could not be made until the papers had received the approval and signature of this gentleman, and from three to four months must elapse before they were returned to Mr. Ball. The latter knew that McClintock would always be able to lay hands on his erratic patron, and was not disturbed when Lord Drumardlee disappeared as suddenly as he had come, saying no farewell, and leaving no address to which letters could be sent. Indeed Joseph's chief care at this moment was to keep his Fidelia from inquiring as to the young man's visits. Should her active mind fasten on that clue, it would soon put her in possession of the other facts, and Joseph would never have heard the last of his short-sightedness in not calling her to his assistance the moment a suitable match was proposed for Mary.

Just in these days she was much engaged in the nursery, Master Baby having developed a fine attack of measles. Joseph

was certainly not wanting in parental regard for his offspring, but since the chubby infant was in no danger and but small discomfort, he inwardly blessed him for thus timely distracting his mamma's energies into legitimate channels, and it is doubtful whether he had ever before invoked so many blessings on Baby's head as when, two or three days after Robin's departure, he received an unexpected visit from Lord Herries.

James Herries was in residence with his Princess at Richmond, and had ventured back to Hay's Corner to have an hour's talk with Robin, and lure him from what the courtier regarded as either unwholesome solitude or undesirable entanglements. Evelina and her friends had given him their own version of the way Robin was spending his time, and James, who knew much more of his cousin's circumstances than the latter imagined, felt vaguely anxious about him. Had Robin thrown himself openly at the feet of some fine lady, Herries would never have given the affair a second thought. There was no mischief to get into in an ordinary flirtation, and whatever scandal might ensue was sure to add to the gentleman's social value.

But wild love-making to some unknown beauty, whose family might not take the fashionable view of such things, was a very different matter. Mulcaster, Pomfret, and other men who had been of the party raved about the lovely girl, "all cream and roses and virtue," as they swore she seemed. The women sniffed and tittered, and vowed they'd be damned if they could see any beauty in a country maid, sans powder, sans hoop, sans patches, and so silly shy that she ran like a hare from their ladyships' presences !

Joseph, strolling down to the riverside terrace, lost in thought, his hands behind him, suddenly became aware of a very magnificent apparition coming straight towards him as fast as high heels, padded coat, and monster cane would permit. James's hat flew off and went under his arm, and his full, powdered wig was bent low in a fine flourish of a bow. Joseph returned the salutation, and then my lord straightened himself and put his questions sharp and quick, like pistol-shots.

"Mr. Ball, I presume ? Sir, can you give me any news of my cousin, Lord Drumardlee, who was, I hear, a visitor here some days since ?"

Joseph's answer was guarded. "I have the pleasure of the gentleman's acquaintance," he replied, "and it is true that he did honour me by calling here once or twice on a matter of business. Will you come into the house, sir, and tell me whom I have the

pleasure of addressing?" This was a concession to the conventionalities, for Robin had told him something about the courtier cousin.

Joseph's manner was so calm as to be almost patronizing. He at once recognized the species of the fashionable dandy, a creature whom he permitted himself somewhat to despise.

"I thank you, sir," said Herries, irritated at the tacit assumption of superiority taken on by this sober person in sad-coloured clothes. "My name is Herries, I am in attendance on Her Royal Highness at Richmond, and have little time to spare. I shall be obliged if you can tell me where Lord Drumardlee is at this moment."

"I regret I cannot," Joseph replied. "I have not seen his lordship since our affair was concluded, several days ago. I imagined him to be still at Hay's Corner."

"Well, he's not," retorted Herries, "and it looks as if he had jumped into the river, for I can find no trace of him."

And he glanced accusingly at Mr. Ball, as if he suspected him of abduction and wrongful imprisonment of the missing man.

"I can only repeat that I regret my inability to assist you in your search," said Joseph.

Then Herries went back to his boat and dropped down the river, a sorely puzzled man. Joseph returned to the house, looking at each window to make sure that no one had witnessed the interview.

So Robin dropped out of ken for a time, and some months passed before either Herries or Joseph Ball heard of him again. Two days after James's sudden visit to the White House, the news of the king's death came from Hanover, and that excitement threw all others into the shade. The satellites of the Leicester Square Court, suddenly transported to the glories of St. James's Palace, were beside themselves with joy at their own preferment and the humiliation of many an old rival. Joseph found it necessary to spend some weeks in London, keeping an eye on the various business matters in which he was interested, and the White House saw little of him till the end of July. Mary, left alone with Fidelia, openly mourned the ultimate fate of the poor, bad king, cut off in his sins without a moment for preparation or repentance.

"Poor soul, poor soul!" she repeated again and again. "What a terrible end! Oh, Fidelia, I cannot get it out of my

mind! Do you not think God may have had mercy on him at the last?" and her eyes filled with tears at the thought of his perdition—which seemed proclaimed with awful clearness by the manner of his end.

"La, my dear," Fidelia replied, "kings is no different from other people when all's said and done! Why didn't he live decent when he had a chance? That's what I want to know! Do run along like a good girl and see if the curds is set!"

The days were shortening, the garden growing bare, the thinning foliage no longer shut out the sight of the river from the windows of the White House. One more summer had flung itself on earth's breast, to be first consumed, then chilled, in the brown bride's embrace. A rose or two, outstaying its time, hung heavy on the branch. In the bit of wilderness behind the chestnut tree the Michaelmas daisies were having it all their own way, feathering high above shrinking fern and berry-laden briar.

Joseph came back from town unexpectedly one day. He had been trying to persuade Fidelia to remove the family to the big stone house in Gray's Inn Square, which was their usual winter home. It was warm, dark, well lined with seasoned oak and thick hangings and Turkey carpets; and Joseph, who had to spend so much of his time there, began to desire the brightening, if somewhat over-bracing influence of his wife and the children, to cheer the long evenings and the silent meals.

On this day of early November, however, something else had brought him back in haste to Cookham. Two disturbing incidents had marked the previous morning. He had received, in answer to one of his own, a letter from Lord Drumardlee, announcing his imminent return to London; and while in the first flush of elation over this opportunity about to be afforded Mary of changing her mind for her own good, Joseph had run up against Lord Herries in the street, and had been much perplexed by some remarks of that perspicacious nobleman.

"Ah, Mr. Ball, good morning," said Herries, stopping before Joseph with the evident intention of renewing their acquaintance. "I was in some haste when we last met, I fear. I hope Madam Ball and your lovely sister are quite well?"

"You do my sister too much honour, my lord," replied Joseph, not over cordially, for he did not relish the slight tone of patronage in James's voice. "Both she and my wife are in good health. I trust I see you in the same?"

And he made as if to move on, foreseeing very clearly that the

next name to be mentioned would be that of McClean, and having no wish to confide his family affairs at this stage to the gentleman's cousin.

To his surprise, Herries turned, linked an arm in his, and manifested the intention to accompany him on his way. The young man was more splendidly apparelled than ever, and had grown sleeker and a trifle more overbearing since his princess had become a full-blown queen.

"I was wondering, Mr. Ball," he began airily, "whether you ever saw my cousin Drumardlee again after I came to seek him last summer in such perplexity?"

"Let me reflect," said Joseph, staring at the muddy ground. "When was that, my lord? I am such a busy man that ordinary dates have small hold on my memory."

"In the beginning of June, I take it," was Herries's quick reply. "The first of the month most like, since it was just before we received the lamentable news of the death of the king."

"Very afflicting—very sudden," murmured Mr. Ball.

"Of course—of course," said the other; "but I was speaking of my cousin—a flighty, strange creature, but one to whom I am much attached. Since you had business transactions together, doubtless some correspondence has been maintained between you? Ah, just so, I thought you could give me news of him!" And Herries turned and smiled pleasantly in Joseph's face, while Joseph wondered how the devil he had read so much there.

At that moment they met a friend of Mr. Ball, and the latter tried to drop Herries's arm and enter into conversation with his crony—a respectable, elderly merchant who looked a little surprised to find Joseph in such fashionable company.

But James hung to Joseph's arm with calm persistence, and in a moment led him away from hope of rescue. The truth, the uncomfortable truth was this: James had been losing heavily at play, his tradesmen creditors were becoming restive, and he had firmly resolved to find Robin and borrow money from him. He was amused at Joseph's attempts to put him off; they would be quite futile in the end, he knew.

"And from what place did you say my cousin wrote?" he inquired easily. "I have been expecting him every day of late"—this was invention pure and simple, but artistically necessary. "Of course, like the fickle, irresponsible creature he is, he would not think of telling me when to have a room prepared for him! He is not like us—good, law-abiding citizens. He comes when he likes, and goes when he is tired—back to the devil

generally, I fancy—so you see, Mr. Ball, how glad I am to have met the one person to whom he does write with some regularity !”

Joseph's face had grown very long. “Fickle, irresponsible, back to the devil !” Here was a nice husband to be seeking for a man's sister !

“Pray explain yourself, my lord,” he said. “You have used some terms which do not consort with the high opinions I had formed of Lord Drumardlee's character.”

“Keep them—keep them,” cried Herries, laughing, but impatient. Joseph was still staring at him questioningly, and Herries realized that he would be doing himself no good by weakening Robin's credit in the eyes of a rich man, with whom he was perhaps associated in matters of great import to his fortune. So he continued, “My cousin is staunch enough to his friends at heart ; and if the ladies tell another tale, why, that is no business of ours, is it ? When are you expecting him, Mr. Ball ?”

His directness carried the day. Joseph was too much disturbed to attempt further concealment.

“To-morrow perhaps, or the day after,” he replied. “And should I in turn wish to ask you one or two questions, my lord——”

“Why, you'll find me at St. James's Palace, of course,” replied the other, delighted at the prospect of dipping into Robin's generous pocket. Then he hurried away, being as unwilling to answer questions as he was skilful in putting them. Robin's amorous affairs were no business of his, as he had just declared, and he reflected that if there were a pretty girl at Cookham—well, that portly, solemn brother ought to be able to look after her by now without assistance from him.

Well might Joseph stand still and take counsel with himself. He had committed a great imprudence. In his desire for Mary's welfare, and encouraged by the indulgence expressed in one or two of her remarks about Robin, he had so far lost sight of former prejudices as to invite the young man to stay in his house at Cookham. The letter in his pocket expressed eager acceptance of the invitation. Now he would have given the world to recall it—at least until he had made more searching inquiries as to the guest's real character. Only one way out of the dilemma presented itself to his mind ; if he could bring the family up to town he could, at least, have Robin under his eye—a vigilance impossible to exercise at Cookham, whence his affairs compelled his continued absence at this moment. The country house closed on some excuse of the approaching cold weather, he might find a valid reason for not

asking Lord Drumardlee to transfer the pleasure of his company to the London home. So he rode down to Cookham on the morning after his encounter with James, stiffening his back and hardening his heart in preparation for the exercise of just marital authority.

Needless to say, he was routed. Fidelia's grievous anger on learning so late of the important issues at stake bore all before it, and all Joseph's persuasion and energy went to extorting her forgiveness for what she called a "low, deceitful trick, to which of course he had been persuaded by his dear Mary! Who was a wife, a faithful mother, the mistress of his house, compared with that sly minx from the heathen country over the water? Oh, nobody, of course! *She* had no claims to her husband's respect and confidence! She need not be consulted when anything of importance occurred! Oh, dear, no, it was quite enough if she were told when they had all made up their minds what to do, when every servant in the place knew what was toward, and was of course laughing at the mistress for being so easily hoodwinked! Move, now, to-morrow? No, indeed!

And two days at the furthest would see Lord Drumardlee riding into town with bag and baggage, prepared to come on and find a cordial welcome at the White House!

Joseph had no anxiety as to how he would be received there. Fidelia's anxiety to get rid of Mary would make her greet him with open arms, with far more enthusiasm and encouragement than her husband now wished to show him. Mary kept aloof from the discussion, silent and pained at beholding Fidelia's unworthy exhibition of temper; self-reproachful too, for having indulged the shrinking sensitiveness which had prevented her from putting the masterful sister-in-law in possession of the facts at once. Looking upon her own refusal of McClean as decisive, it had seemed both unkind and unnecessary to tell the story of his rejection. She was terribly distressed when she found that neither he nor Joseph had accepted her verdict as final; in the storm which suddenly burst on the domestic peace of the White House—a storm which revealed all too clearly Fidelia's sentiments towards her husband's sister—Mary was almost tempted to think that the men were in the right, that she had been too hasty, and that after all it might be her duty to accept Robin, and thus remove the hitherto unconscious cause of so much jealousy and contention.

Far back in the vernal glades of memory, lay a shadow where she had once seen a great light. Emerging from childhood into the dazzling, beautiful world of youth, her heart had leapt at some

words of kind approval and gentle advice, had gone out unconsciously to a great, warm-hearted, honourable man, who had watched with deep interest and tenderness the lovely child as she lingered on the threshold of her gracious youth. She had felt then that a word of approbation from him would outweigh all other applause, that any renouncing would be easier than to survive his condemnation. Young as she was when he married, a sudden unexpected pang told her that the old affection might in time have taken another name; and from that moment she passed sentence upon herself, and banished his familiar picture from her conscious remembrance. But the trick of mind which had already led her to compare others with him would not be forgotten, and, in spite of stern self-repression, she knew that the mention of his name still made music in her ears.

Was she permitting her life to be shaped, her decisions to be swayed, by the thought of another woman's husband? Ah, she would prove to herself that it was not so. This coward blush that dyed her cheeks at the suggestion should never burn there again. She was a woman now, and she would take up the sober duties of wifehood in deference to her good brother's wish, she would join the patient ranks of those who fulfilled great service cheerfully; no longer would she stand aside with folded hands that refused to take up the burdens of life.

And since her will was to be sacrificed, the sacrifice should be complete. Robin McClean's character had satisfied Joseph, the kindest and most careful of men; her own impressions of him had grown vague and colourless; if he came now she would try to accept him, to please Joseph.

Lame, bald outcome of deep conscientious thought! At the time she reached it, Joseph was considering what means he could take to hold her back from any instant decision. He must move warily. Robin must be intercepted in London, where he would stop for a few hours to rest before going down to the country house. Joseph's first letter, containing the unlucky invitation, had been sent off quite a month ago, and had been followed by another which informed Robin that the papers relating to the Virginia purchase had been returned, and were now lying in Mr. Ball's office in Gray's Inn; it went on to say that if Lord Drumardlee would call there on arriving in London, the one or two formalities still to be gone through could be accomplished before host and guest proceeded together to the White House. From Robin's own account of his movements, the second letter would have had full time to reach him at the address

he had given in Scotland, before he should have started on his journey to the south. He no longer had his correspondence sent to McClintock's care, and had made no mention to Joseph of any intended stay in Edinburgh. Joseph's first epistle, inviting him to Cookham, had found him paying a visit to a cousin, F——, of Relig, in Inverness-shire; its kind, encouraging tone made him resolve to travel south at once. So he had cut short his visit and started on his journey while Joseph's second communication was on its way to the north.

With sound reasoning Robin had chosen to let some weeks go by between his short stay at Duart and his next interview with Mary. Time was needed to restore him to health and calmness after his recent experiences, and prudence, if not some higher feeling, forbade his thrusting himself into her presence till all taint of certain atrocities should have passed from his mind. For a time these seemed to envelop him with their atmosphere, so real as to seem ponderable. Then, in the intercourse with his fellow-creatures, their memory became less sharp, less insistent, at last disappeared altogether unless he willingly recalled it. Only then did he feel that he could safely go to Mary; a sudden rejuvenation of all his being seemed to have given him back the joyful confidence of youth, its animal spirits and fresh, eager strength. And just then came Joseph's letter. Why wait longer?

Events to which the most profound consideration has been afforded in their anticipation have a surprising way of settling themselves off-hand without any reference to the proper authorities. Joseph went back to town determined to get most full and exact information about Robin before allowing him to see Mary again, and made up his mind to say nothing to her about the man until he should have obtained it. Mary was left alone with Fidelia, still believing that her marriage with Lord Drumardlee was the dearest wish of her brother's heart; and Drumardlee himself, far too eager for another sight of her to waste a moment on the way, went straight to Cookham, and arrived there at supper-time on the very day when Joseph had gone back to meet him in London.

The children were in bed, and the two ladies had just sat down to supper in the great, half-lighted dining-room, when there was a sound of horses' feet in the avenue, followed by a commotion at the hall door. William, giving vent to his usual exclamation of surprise, "Lord of battles!" hurried away to find out what had happened, and Mary and Fidelia sat mute, staring at each other in frank consternation.

"Is it Joseph?" whispered Fidelia; "what in the world can

bring him back in such a hurry?" And she turned her face to the door and listened. That was not Joseph's well-known voice in the hall.

"It is not Joseph," said Mary, who had turned very pale, "that—is Lord Drumardlee!"

The next moment they both rose to their feet. William was holding open the door, and Robin was standing on the threshold.

Fidelia was equal to the occasion. She came forward and made a deep curtsy. "Welcome, my lord," she said when she had recovered her balance and stood before him, a plump little lady with very red cheeks and bright eyes; "I am grieved that my husband is not here to receive your lordship, but he will only return from London to-morrow. Meanwhile, you must put up with the society of us poor women! I think you have met our sister Mary?"

"Madam," said Robin, bowing very low over the hand she extended to him, "the pleasure of making your desired acquaintance consoles me for the absence of my good friend, Mr. Ball. I trust I have not startled you by this sudden inroad. Mistress Mary, your servant!"

Mary had advanced one or two steps, and greeted him with heightening colour, which, even in the commotion of his own feelings at the moment, struck him favourably. In a few minutes he was seated at the table, and all constraint of shyness quickly vanished. Robin had never appeared so cheerful, so normal; the light was dancing in his eyes; he was strong, gay, confident—altogether a delightful acquisition to the depressed little party of two, who had not been on the most pleasant terms of late.

And Mary, weary of strain and covert dissension, realized that she was unfeignedly glad to see him. His quick remarks, his graceful, upright carriage, all spoke to health of body and mind. The girl wondered that she should ever have called him weak, emotional, moody. Here was a gallant, joyous man, come for conquest no doubt, but evidently bent on effecting it by legitimate means. He made no attempt to find himself alone with her. When, by some accident, they stood together in the embrasure of a window after supper, Robin kept his distance, made no allusion to past events, and only manifested his feelings by asking Mary many kind questions about herself, questions which showed how minutely he remembered all that he had learnt of her tastes and occupations. She felt quite safe and supreme when they all parted for the night, and laughed a little over Fidelia's sudden expressions of anxious affection for her. !

"I never saw thee look so well, Molly," said Mrs. Ball after they had mounted the stairs together, leaving the guest to that hour of soothing intercourse with tobacco and liquor which always seems necessary to man's after-repose. "And I wasn't the only one, my dear! My lord Drumardlee never took his eyes off thee! And what a fine, handsome young man he is! Lord, Mr. Ball would look old and fat beside him! Thank Heaven you had your new gown on! There's a seam in the back wants taking in though. Turn round, and I'll put some minikin pins in for Nancy to sew it in the morning!"

She placed her candle on the dressing-table, and twisting Mary round by the shoulders, proceeded to indicate the required alteration. The girl accepted various stabs with the pin-points as evidence of returning amity. It was long since Fidelia had bestowed so much attention on her young sister-in-law. When it was all done, Mrs. Ball straightened herself, and took up her candlestick determinedly, walked over to the bed, shook up little Susie, who was sleeping on her face, and tucked her in safely. Then she came back to Mary and kissed her on both cheeks.

"I've been cross to you lately, Molly," she said, "but you mustn't take any count of that. Married women has a deal to put up with, you know."

"Have they?" said Molly, smiling rather sleepily. "Then isn't it better to die an old maid? 'Better a mess of herbs and contentment therewith,' says the Bible."

"The man that wrote *that*, my dear," was Fidelia's instant reply, "had never tried it, I'll go bail! There isn't one of 'em wouldn't rather have a collop off the stalled ox, even with a dash of scolding sauce to its flavouring, than a bad dinner and a wife who can't say 'ho' to a goose!" and with this startling piece of scripture commentary Fidelia departed, leaving Mary to some very interesting meditations.

Robin was up and dressed early the next day; the kind, unembarrassed manner of Mary's reception of him had carried his hopes to triumphant heights. As he walked in the garden in the crisp, golden freshness of the morning, he felt a certainty of success that was as new as it was delightful. William called him in to breakfast, and he found both the ladies waiting for him; Fidelia behind the urn, and Mary, looking fresher than a rose in May, putting little Susie into her high chair by her mother's side. The table gleamed with polished silver and dainty china; on the sideboard stood two great sheaves of autumnal wild flowers,

reflecting themselves in a broad, low mirror, where the sunshine made a haze of their delicate tracery, and broke in shifting arrows of light here and there about the room. Happiness was in the air, as Robin had never felt it before in his life.

"And when may we expect Mr. Ball?" he asked, turning to Fidelia, who was very busy over the teacups.

"Well, my lord," she replied, "to tell you the truth, I do not know. I think he is expecting you."

Robin looked surprised. "Where, madam?" he asked. "Mr. Ball's letter mentioned no other place than this one, where I now have the good fortune to be."

"Then you did not receive his second letter?" said Fidelia; "I told him it would not reach you in time, but of course he would not listen to me!"

Robin looked troubled at this blunt speech, and Mary made haste to explain away his doubts. "It was of but slight importance," she said, addressing Fidelia. "Joseph thought that Lord Drumardlee might like to look at certain papers in his office before coming on to Cookham. We will despatch Anthony with a letter to him to say that our guest is already here, if you think right, sister, and Joseph will be with us before evening."

"I would not hurry him for the world," protested Robin, "doubtless he is a very busy man." Then he sat, amused to watch Mary's efforts to prevent little Susie from spilling her bread and milk over her clean pinafore.

"Aunt Molly's terrible particular this morning," said the little lady with a roguish glance at Robin. "I got my Sunday frock on for you, that's why!"

"I am profoundly honoured," said Robin, smiling back at her. How fair and simple was life after all, and how serenely at ease he felt among Mary's surroundings!

"Little girls must be seen and not heard," said Susie's mamma. "No, don't give her any jam, Molly; she made a face at Nancy this morning!"

"'Cos she was rude first, ma'am," returned the child pertly. "Where's your funny old man gone, sir? Nancy said——"

Here Mary intervened quickly. "Hush, Susie! Pray excuse the child, my lord! She hath been so much alone with us women that she is something of a chatterbox."

"A sad confession, Mistress Mary," laughed Robin. "You must be very expert at concealment, for when I was here last, you left me to do all the talking, and very much I must have wearied you, I fear."

But Mary made no answer for a moment. She was busy lifting Susie down from her chair. Then she said—

"Shall we go into the garden for a while? 'Tis a fine, warm morning."

So they all wandered out, and in a few minutes Fidelia returned to the house, intent on her many duties; the little girl ran away, chasing a belated butterfly between the box-hedges, and Robin and Mary were alone. Silence fell upon them and they moved on, each acutely conscious of the other's unspoken thoughts, till they stood under the chestnut-tree at the far end of the lawn. It was almost leafless now, and through the branches the morning sunshine poured down on Mary's head and warmed her through and through. She put out her hand and laid it on the tree's bark.

"It is almost hot to touch," she said softly. "It has a life of its own, I think, and will be warm even in winter."

"What would not live, under your hand?" he answered. And then they were silent again.

"Mary," he said suddenly, "you know what I have come for. Am I to have it?"

The simple, direct appeal startled her. She was not prepared for it so soon.

"You must know," she began, looking down and speaking very demurely, "that I wish you everything that makes for your felicity here, and hereafter, but——"

"Leave out the hereafter," said Robin, quickly; "here is enough for me—if you will give it me."

She raised her sweet, serious eyes and looked at him reproachfully. "You must not say that," she replied; "this is for a little while, that for ever. We must not forget."

"I think you never forget," he cried impatiently. "Oh, who am I to outweigh your safe eternity? You would not sacrifice an instant of it to save me from death! How can a lovely, sweet woman be so stern and selfish? I throw my heart at your feet, and you ask for theology! Have you a heart, child? Can it not ache a little for a poor mortal who cries to you for leave to live?"

"Ah, you are unkind," she answered, and the tears stood in her eyes as she spoke. "No man should say such things to—the woman he loves!"

"No, dear, he should not," said Robin, softening at sight of her pain; "it is not true, I know. But—I have suffered so much—I love you so unspeakably—give me the one little word I

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want! Give me the priceless treasure that you are, my dearest, dearest love!"

She was stirred. Her warm, young heart went out to his despairing cry. He was standing before her, holding out his hands, pleading for his life. It seemed not hard to give. The gracious hands came out to meet his, the sweet eyes looked in his face, all suffused with pity.

"I will, Robin," she said, very falteringly. Then he bowed his face on her two hands, and was dumb for the magnitude of his joy.

"Poor Robin," she murmured, scarce knowing what she said. Then she drew her hands away and went swiftly to the house, nor paused till she was safe in the solitude of her room. The great step was taken, and the knowledge of it brought a storm of emotion that could be confided to none.

CHAPTER VII

A QUICK step sounded in the gallery, and some one knocked sharply at Mary's door. She opened it to find Fidelia, a letter in her hand. Fidelia was visibly angry, too angry to see the traces of agitation in Mary's face.

"A letter for you from Joseph," she said, "and I'd like to know why he can't write to me, seeing I'm here, and mistress of the house! Upon my word, you and he seem to be having some mighty important secrets, miss! Him not gone over a day, and sending down a man post haste, and the mare in such a lather as you never saw! What is it all about? I insist upon knowing!"

"You had better read it," said Mary, with a great effort at self-control, "and I will leave you to tell him that you have done so."

"And I've just sent off Anthony to let him know my lord Drumardlee is here!" exclaimed Fidelia, a little taken aback by Mary's calmness. "Of course I shan't read it; I hope you know me well enough for that, Molly! But you'd best open it and see if we are to send a man to stop Anthony with the other. Pshaw, what a useless pother about nothing! For I'm sure it's nothing! For mercy's sake, open it, child, and find out what has happened!"

Her anger was overcome by her anxiety. She sat down, panting with her run upstairs and her extreme irritation.

Mary slowly broke the great splotchy seal, and glanced at the letter. All too quickly she gathered its import. She laid it on the table and raised a white face to her sister-in-law's inquiring eyes.

"Good Lord!" cried Mrs. Ball, "what has happened? Can't you speak?"

For all answer Mary pushed the paper towards her. Fidelia snatched at it and began to read aloud, slowly and with difficulty, for she was but a poor scholar. This was what Joseph had written to his sister:

"MY DEAR MOLLY,

"It is with the greatest sorrow and Regret that I take up my Pen to write to you, for after all that I have said to dispose you favourably to a certain Marriage, it is most Unfortunate that I should have to give you such Tidings as this Present must impart. As you are aware, I am hourly expecting the Arrival of Lord Drumardlee in London, and was in hopes of bringing him to Cookham, there to obtain a Favourable Answer to his suit. As in every Circumstance of Life, there is to be found a cause for Thankfulness to an Allwise Providence, so is it now. In the Agitation which besets me, I am at least Heartily Glad that this Warning hath arrived before the Subject of it had again been received into my House."

Fidelia dropped the letter to throw up her hands in dismay. "Lord a' mercy, Molly," she cried, "but the man's here! What's to do?"

"Go on," said Mary, almost hoarsely; "there's worse coming."

Fidelia took up the letter again, and with difficulty found the place where she had left off. Then she went on, spelling out the long, involved sentences, while Mary sat dumb, her face in her hands, wondering what had been the part of an "Allwise Providence" in the terrible embroilment of to-day's circumstances.

"I have this Day received a Letter from Mr. McClintock, so entirely opposed to his former ones, that, but for my long knowledge of him, I should be tempted to think it written by a Madman. But it unhappily bears the Stamp of Truth, and I cannot refuse to be convinced. He tells me that Lord Drumardlee hath been guilty of black Ingratitude to his most faithful friend, and that this Ingratitude did take the ugliest Form Imaginable. I must not shock my dearest Molly's delicate feelings by enlarging on such a Revolting Subject. McClintock does explain that he had not Thought it necessary to inform me earlier of these events which took place some Three Months since, I having told him that my lord D. had left these Parts in the Summer; but, on hearing of that Person's return to England he felt it his Duty to Warn me against receiving such a Bad Immoral Man into my House. He adds that he does most Deeply Regret having so Warmly recommended him to me before, but for this no Fault can be impugned to McClintock, since he was then in Ignorance of my Lord Drumardlee's Real Character, than Which I perceive, none could well be Worse. Wherefore I will beg my dear Sister to dismiss from her Thoughts one whose Cause I had mistakenly advocated with her, and who is now Proved Unworthy

of her Regard. She may rest assured that I will Protect her from all Annoyance on his part, and I Trust that she Will find in the Affection of her Relatives a Complete Compensation for any Disappointment she may feel at Losing the Prospect of a Suitable Marriage. Dear Molly, Fidelia will, I know, do her Best to make you forget these Unfortunate Occurrences, and I will await Lord Drumardlee's Arrival here, and have the Stern Satisfaction of sending the Wretched Deceiver about his Business. I have ordered thee a Fine Martin Cloak for the Winter, my dear, same as Fidelia had last year.

"Thy loving Affectionate brother,
"JOSEPH BALL."

The reading had taken some time. When it was over, Mrs. Ball raised her head and stared at Mary in dismay, her plump cheeks pale and fallen, and tears of vexation in her eyes. Mary sat white and silent, her hands clasped, an expression of the deepest horror and pain on her face. Fidelia rose and came round to where she sat.

"My poor Molly," she said simply, "I saw thee accept him but now."

Mary looked up in her face. "I can never believe in any man again," she said. "It did seem as if he loved me, Fidelia. I did not love him—perhaps I ought never to have yielded—but I was so sorry for him—and I wanted to please Joseph—oh, three months since—after he went from here, from me—it is horrible!"

And in her strong revulsion of feeling she took refuge in Fidelia's arms, and wept some of her pain away there. For Fidelia's heart was in the right place, after all.

As soon as the two women were restored to some composure, it was necessary for them to consider what should be done. Joseph would come down at all speed on receiving the news sent off an hour ago, but it was impossible for him to rejoin his family before the evening, and meanwhile, what was to be done about the man who was at this moment pacing the garden in a wild delusion of happiness, in all the tempestuous joyfulness of the just accepted lover? Never was Joseph's presence so ardently longed for before. Was Robin to be left in his fool's paradise till Joseph's return?

"We'll both have headaches, Molly, and no lie neither," suggested Mrs. Ball, "and stay upstairs together! William must give the viper enough to eat and drink, and Joseph will send him packing this evening! 'Tis the least he can do, to take *that* off our hands, after getting us all into this muddle."

"No, no," cried Mary, "it would be inhuman—ungenerous—to let the man go on believing—what he believes now! He must know at once! Fidelia, pray, pray go down and tell him—tell him I have changed my mind, that Joseph forbids—tell him anything that will make him understand!"

"I'll do nothing of the sort," said Fidelia, stoutly; "he's not fit for a decent woman to talk to, and how do I know the creature won't begin making love to me now? He'd have a surprise if he did."

"He will not do that," said Molly, feeling an hysterical inclination to laugh in spite of her profound distress. "'Tis clear he must be told. I've done enough harm, though God knows," she cried with a sob, "I was trying to do right! But I will not add to any creature's misery, however unworthy he may be! If you will not go down, Fidelia, I must. Joseph would wish it."

"Molly," said Fidelia, kissing her, "you'll make a better wife than I have ever been. I do believe you would walk into the fire if you thought it was your duty!"

"I would rather do that than this," said Molly.

"I'll come with you if you like," Fidelia replied; "but, upon my word, I wouldn't face Lord Drumardlee alone. He frightens me when he's good, and I'm sure he is a demon when he gets into a rage. Let's leave him to himself, my dear! 'Tis better than he deserves."

"No," said Molly, "I am going to him now. And what is more, I will speak to him alone—I am not afraid. He always listens to me, and maybe I can say some word he'll remember when better thoughts come! 'Tis but common charity, seeing he hath verily sinned against me."

More deeply than she knew had he sinned against her. But the most unpardonable of his crimes was mercifully kept from her knowledge. She let Fidelia smooth her hair and bathe her face with sweet, cool rose-water, then she took her sister-in-law's hand and led her out into the gallery.

"I want you to come downstairs and be not far away," she said; "it will give me strength to know that, Fidelia. But what I have to say to him no one else should hear."

She left Fidelia in the drawing-room, and stepped out on the lawn. Robin came forward and met her halfway, his face radiant at seeing her again so soon, his Mary now!

But when he came close to her he saw that something terrible had happened.

"What is it?" he cried. "Why do you look at me like that?"

"Because," said Mary, calling up all her courage, "I have come—to say—farewell."

"Are you mad?" he asked, coming closer and looking down into her face. "There's no farewell between us, Mary! My dearest, you have just promised to be my wife!"

She shuddered. Under the cold daylight of the November sky she kept her eyes on his, unflinching, though this ordeal was terrible to her.

"It is farewell," she said. "I promised—yes, it was a promise—to marry one whom I could honour—whom I could have loved, perhaps. You are not he. My brother has heard—he forbids," she faltered.

He thought he understood. "It is not true," he cried. "I told you once, and I tell you now, there is no law of God or man that can come between us! Ah, Mary, don't send me away from you for sins that touch you not, that are all behind me, that I scarce knew for sins since I knew you not then! Oh, my dear, do you think——"

"I cannot think," said Mary, very white now; "I am a woman. I cannot judge for you. But, even if my heart forgave you—and it could, it could, Robin, I owe obedience—my brother is all I have—he does know—I will abide by his command. You must go. I will never see you again."

After a few moments of silence, she spoke again, with great gentleness. "If I have hurt you," she said, "it was because—I did not know. I am not angry with you, I am grieved, grieved in my very heart for you, and I do not judge. Ah, poor Robin, won't you try to be—what I hoped you were? It is not so very hard, and you will be happy—'tis indeed the only way. I cannot help you, but God will. Good-bye—Robin! Please—live kind and true—always."

No, she would not touch his hand, but she looked bravely into his face; hers was like the face of an angel seeing a soul return to God.

Under the cold, midday sky he knelt, careless of all eyes but hers, and he bowed himself and touched the hem of her garment to his lips.

Of her own free will she bent towards him and laid her hand on his head. Then she left him and moved away, and he knelt on, afraid to look at her. The air seemed stirred by unseen wings.

"Oh, Joseph, I am so glad you have come! Dear husband,

pray do not ever leave me again!" And Fidelia threw herself into her husband's arms, and wept for very relief on his shoulder.

"There, there, my dear," he said, soothingly. "God send there is no harm done, but you must have had a dreadful day! And you don't know the half yet! Where is he? Did my letter come in time? Have you kept Mary upstairs?"

"My dear," said Fidelia, lifting her head and wiping her eyes, "Molly is the best and sweetest girl in the world, and I feel like a bad, wicked woman for ever having found fault with her! When your letter came the poor child was heart-broken—I think the wretch had made her care a little for him after all. She had just accepted him, Joseph. I hadn't the courage to go and speak to him!" She told him the story of Robin's dismissal, and added, "He is a villain, but I couldn't help feeling sorry for him."

"I don't," said Joseph, fiercely. "Fidelia, you must never tell Molly—I believe it would kill her—but I met that cousin of his this morning, just after I had written to Molly, and he told me——"

"What?" cried Fidelia. "Oh, do sit down, Joseph, and let me fetch you a glass of wine! You look so dreadfully ill!" And she pushed Joseph into a chair.

He caught at her as she was moving away to fetch the wine! "My dear," he said, "Lord Herries told me that—Lord Drumardlee has been married—these ten years!"

"Good God!" gasped Fidelia, and she sank into a chair beside her husband.

A light step sounded on the stairs. "You must never tell her!" said Mary's brother.

"Never, I promise," whispered his wife, and he knew that she would keep her word.

Mary came forward into the light of the lamp. Her face was very sweet, very calm, the face of one who has overcome in the first great conflict of life. Joseph, weary and stiff with his long ride, rose unsteadily to his feet and opened his arms to her. She ran into them silently, and he kissed her forehead.

"My dear little Molly!" he said. That was all, but it meant a great deal from Joseph. Neither then nor afterwards did he ever allude, in her presence, to the events of that day.

BOOK II

AUGUSTINE WASHINGTON

CHAPTER I

MORE than two years passed away, and it seemed to Mary Ball that she had found her life's place in her brother's family. Joseph watched her, marvelling, in his stolid way, at the growing sweetness and strength of her character. She had become the centre of the home; Fidelia, who never took back what she had once given, looked upon Mary as her greatest helper and friend; the children obeyed her unhesitatingly, far more readily, indeed, than they obeyed their quick-tempered mother. Joseph had been very anxious at first lest the shock the girl had received should embitter her mind. He believed that every woman's highest ambition was to be married early and well; and in spite of past experience he expected to find that Mary would feel deeply disappointed at losing what he had called the prospect of a suitable marriage. But here she was, at two and twenty, a maiden still, and showing none of the symptoms of peevishness and sourness which in those days were supposed to be the result of the undesirable and invidious estate of spinsterhood. She was a little graver than of yore; she had been brought face to face with some saddening realities of life. But while more scrupulous than ever in the discharge of her own duties, she was also more indulgent in her judgment of the conduct of others. Her religious life, of which she never spoke, became more vitally important to her; she gave more time to reading and meditation, and, if serious subjects were discussed, and she were appealed to, would answer in a definite, gentle manner which showed how familiar such thoughts were to her mind, and how high the standards which she had set before herself. This was the more

remarkable, as, at that time, even very honest and right-thinking persons had become exceptionally callous to the claims of religion ; its ministers were men of low birth, and often of the loosest character, who followed their calling from motives of gain alone ; and the utter disregard of Christianity shown in high places made it generally fashionable to give it the go-by in all matters of daily life.

In the great world of court and politics all issues except those of personal indulgence or ambition appeared to have been banished from men's minds ; the canker of corruption was eating its way to the surface from within ; family life was forgotten, conjugal fidelity laughed at, parental discipline punished severely any lapse from outward respect and took no count whatever of its own obligations towards children. The army was a hotbed of dissension and vice, politicians were sold and bought, and the heads of the state were scandalously wicked, their lives of satanic cynicism, of brazen immorality, a fine encouragement to all that was worst in the human nature of the day.

Well might Joseph Ball shake his head and bemoan the future of the country, as he sat one day talking things over with an old friend newly arrived from the other side of the water.

"I do assure you, my dear Augustine," he said, "that an honest man has many doubts as to whether it be his duty to permit his sons to grow up in such a country as this poor England hath become ! Were it not that my hands are tied by the manifold interests of my business, I would seriously consider the transporting of my family into the cleaner airs you have lately left. I do often think with sincere regret of that fair and healthy estate in which my friends may live in America."

The two men were sitting in the severe apartment where Joseph was wont to conduct his business, a great dark room looking into Gray's Inn Square. It was lined from floor to ceiling with ancient oak, and the tall fireplace was surmounted by a magnificent coat of arms carved in the same wood and showing a boar's head on the shield, for this had been the home of a most illustrious spirit some hundred years earlier. Here Francis Bacon had read and thought and dreamed, touching in inspired moments the very secrets of life and then losing them with tears. The lovely carvings of flowers and fruit had been added by Grinling Gibbons after his time, but the oaken panelings were those which must have echoed to that voice of "magicke sweetness and power" which still seems to breathe from the precious pages dear to

chosen souls. Elizabethan literature was as strange to the days of the Georges as Elizabethan thought. The great belittling had been well accomplished, and men's minds were cramped and shrunk by the process known to gardeners and monster-mongers as "dwarf making." Long years had still to pass ere they shattered their wooden swaddling clothes and tried their feet and reached out to the great miscalled dead to give them of their wisdom and guide them on the road.

Joseph Ball had hardly heard the name of Francis Bacon ; it meant no more to him than that of King Canute or the Venerable Baeda ; but if he did not seek for truth (being well satisfied with such doles thereof as his forbears and contemporaries had served out to him), he at least did his best to live by the lights he had ; and, since an honest man is never out of his place in the hallowed haunts of greatness, was as worthy an occupant of these storied chambers as the times could afford.

The arrival of Augustine Washington that day had brought to him a thing he seldom suffered from, a strong regret for the home that could be his on the other side of the water ; the sight of his old friend and neighbour, the strong ring of that colonial speech, which always seemed to be calling across the spacious width of new lands, of a larger world than this English one, the very words still used by the American settlers, though long since dropped from the speech of the mother country—all these things made the prosperous, middle-aged business man, who had returned to cast in his lot with her, feel a sudden pang of veritable home-sickness for that which he had voluntarily abandoned.

Even the appearance of Mr. Washington, his clear eye and dauntless carriage, struck Joseph as absurdly, happily youthful when he remembered that the visitor was but a few years junior to himself. If life was short in old Virginia, at least men were young, confident, brave, to its last day.

Yet England could see in these, her sons, nothing but a growing menace to her own prosperity. Hampered in a thousand ways, held back where they should have been encouraged and applauded, their industries crushed by intolerable enactments, their money claimed for English-made articles which they could have manufactured for themselves at a tenth of the cost, their country flooded with slave labour against which they protested manfully but in vain (since the revenue accruing therefrom was necessary to the British Government), their petitions and representations flung aside unopened for a long course of years—yet these calm, smiling, obstinate gentlemen refused to be ignored,

and waited with incredible self-control and patience for the inevitable.

It was eighteen years later that an observant traveller * declared that, in his opinion, and that of his informants in America, complete separation from England was but a matter of time. Those at the heart of things, those who had accustomed themselves to look beyond the moment, were already regretfully familiar with the idea when Augustine Washington came to England in the third year of the reign of George the Second.

That year was still young on the winter day when, after over two months of ocean voyaging, he landed at the Greenwich docks and was met by Joseph Ball, who wished at once to carry him off to the old house in Gray's Inn Square. Augustine, eagerly interested in all that he saw, could hardly be persuaded to come indoors at all. He had received his education in England, but had not revisited the mother country since that time; there were so many things he longed to see again—St. Paul's, Westminster Abbey, the great Hall of St. Stephen's, all the splendid monuments whose majesty had lost nothing in transmission from the memory of the youth to the imagination of the man. And Joseph, amused, as at the enjoyment of an eager boy, yielded to his desire, and took him from one historical spot to another, until the early winter night came down and drove them in to home and fireside.

The ladies were out, spending the day with a friend. "We'll be back in time for supper, Mr. Ball," Fidelia had said when she bade farewell to him in the morning. "Everything is ready, if Mr. Washington's vessel really gets in to-day, but you've expected him for a week past and I don't believe he'll be here for another se'nnight—with the weather he must have had, poor man! So Molly and me and the children'll go to Madam Paston as we had promised, and do pray not go waiting about in the cold for a ship as is certainly out at sea! There's a good Joseph!"

So it came to pass that the two men had a long, cosy hour of converse, uninterrupted by any feminine excitement. When the first inquiries about old friends had been answered, Mr. Washington began to speak about the true object of his visit, the great question of iron manufacturing in the colonies, an industry in which he was deeply interested and which had just received another crushing blow from the home authorities. England was still "home" to the colonist, even to him who had first seen the light in America.

"It is entirely incredible," said Augustine, "that with the

* Kalne, the Swede.

great riches of ore at our disposal, we should not be allowed so much as a single forge on our own side of the water! Restriction we have accepted, obeying a thousand teasing injunctions against carrying on the work, most necessary in a new country, of smithing our iron into bolts, hoops, nails—the commonest adjuncts of building! But when it comes to prohibiting us from even casting it into bars and rods for better transportation, 'tis time to speak, and firmly! I am convinced that all this defending and forbidding doth come from sheer ignorance on the part of those in power, and most malicious avarice in the under-men who would protect some paltry private interests by murdering our great and lawful ones!"

"Malicious avarice!" exclaimed Joseph, "why, man, you have in those two words described the very ruling motive of the whole Government! The king alone may perhaps not participate in the sentiment, for I am told that he asks but one thing, to be royally excused from bestowing a thought on his poor subjects across the sea! But to make up for that abstention on his part, there be thousands in every walk in life, from the prime minister down to the country weaver and the grocer's apprentice, who look upon America but as a safe and fine market where poor wares can be dumped in to fetch high prices! How much longer can such injustice be endured?"

"God knows!" said Augustine thoughtfully. "There are those who talk of cutting loose from the old dependence which all right-thinking persons would cling to loyally, were it not turned into a noose to throttle life itself! Were we supreme in the Americas 'twould be matter for possible thought, but with the French ever pressing in at our gates, north and south and west, why we must take what defences England will vouchsafe to us, and e'en pay the fancy price she puts on them!"

"A fancy price," said Joseph, "is only paid till the article required can be got at honest bargaining. Cannot American troops be raised to guard American frontiers?"

Augustine laughed aloud. "My good friend," he exclaimed, "you have lived here so long that you have forgotten our conditions. 'Tis all we can do to get news from one State to another, across those illimitable spaces of forest, lake, and desert that divide them! The only thing we have is land, land, land, and your England would be lost a dozen times over between Fredericksburg and Boston! And gaily as life goes with us in Virginia and Maryland and Delaware, we must give every minute of it to mastering the land, to building, sowing, reaping, governing,

or the land would master us—swallow up its owners, and relapse into primeval forest. No, we can spare no men for soldiers, nor would our rulers here permit it! We may train a few unwilling militia to frighten the Indians, but the regular commissions are for the home-grown favourites. They may wear the king's uniform and swagger it in our streets, and the born Virginian who provides their rations shall take every insult meekly, as becomes a civilian when honoured by an officer's notice! No," he rose and began to walk up and down the room, as if trying to work off the agitation which this aspect of the question was apt to rouse in him, "we are not ripe for army-making, nor ever shall be, I believe! There is a something born in us which does instinctively defy command. 'Twould be as hard for the poorest farmer's son out there as for myself to take orders and cursings from one he could not answer. We must win our battles with other weapons—the weapons of patience and persistence and unconquerable vitality! And win we shall, I am confident of it! We are few and weak yet, but the time is not far off when they must listen to us!"

Joseph looked at him admiringly. Was he sorry that he had cut himself off from that fine fellowship of labours and ambitions shared? He felt almost homeless as he listened to that strong "we" and "us" of Augustine's speech. Augustine was one of a family—Joseph, by comparison, a stranger in a crowd.

"The difficulty is to obtain the opportunity to speak," he said, after a moment's thought. "If you think, my dear Augustine, that you have but to go to Whitehall and deliver your opinions to the Prime Minister, I fear you are very much mistaken. Sir Robert Walpole announces himself as easy of access to all, but there are those between him and the public who will make you pay many hundreds of pounds for the favour of an interview, and will then plot to baulk you of its results. How do you propose to obtain your desire? Are you prepared to spend money freely? There is no other road to success in this place."

"But," said Augustine, "I bring a petition signed by two hundred gentlemen of the colony. Surely that is a sufficient guarantee of the importance of my mission! 'Twould be the act of a fool to support this just cause with the base methods of bribery and palm-greasing! I will not spend a penny on such dirty outlay!" And he stood up before Joseph, very tall and straight, his head in the air and a fine fire of indignation in his blue eyes.

"Then you will never see the Prime Minister," was Joseph's quick reply. "And little as I count upon his power to help you,

your only chance lies in reaching him and keeping clear of those men upon whom hath been laid the particular obligation of conducting the colonial business. Walpole is himself not venal, nor is he ill disposed to America; he is too sound a financial politician not to desire the legitimate extensions of commerce. But every suggestion that he might otherwise bring forward for your relief shall be subjected to this universal test—will it endanger his hold on public opinion here? That is his colleague, his conscience, his God! With open eyes he would abandon the best and subscribe to the worst measure ever proposed, did an opposite course threaten to estrange the mass of the people upon whose approval his tenure of office hath now come to rest. 'Let me be a wise man if I may,' says he, 'and I will conduct this nation to peace and prosperity; but an' a fool you will have, well, that fool shall be myself! Whatever may result from your blindness, it shall not be my dismissal!'"

"And why should I not go straight to the King?" inquired Augustine. "Since Virginia is a proprietary State, and honoured with a special representative of his Majesty, with a court and council framed on the model of his own, he is in a manner more closely bound to her than to most of the other Colonial States, and she hath a stronger claim on his paternal interest."

"The king," replied Joseph, "is, as I said but now, in happy oblivion to Virginia's existence, and will elect to remain so. No, no, my friend, the Virginian who comes here to interest great men in his country, must bring with him a map to show them in what part of the world it lies. Such geography is too unimportant for their acquiring! The distant, poor colony is a fine place to remember when they would rid themselves of too faithful or too clamorous a partisan. Let him be bundled off to hold royal state in Fredericksburg and beware of disturbing them with news of him after his arrival there! The colonist brood has been shoved from the nest, and now it may take care of itself, provided it keep these two commandments straitly—it shall not learn to fly—and all that it can capture must be brought home to glut the maw of its loving parent!"

"Let me complete your fine rhetorical simile," replied Augustine, smiling at this unwonted flight of fancy on the part of his prosaic friend; "the parent forgets that independent flight is necessary even to that filial occupation!"

"Oh, I am sick when I contemplate the course of things here," Joseph went on, relapsing into facts. "Never was sensible man called upon to behold such rapacity, folly, and suicidal vice as in

London to-day! I hold that there are millions of honest men in this country, earning honest livelihoods and bringing up their families in decency and virtue, but those words may not be pronounced here. Although I am forced to have my domicile in this Babylon, I will permit my family no intercourse with its debauched society, and, but things mend within the next few years, will send my boy over to grow up with my sister Elizabeth's children! Augustine, I was most truly grieved to hear of your deplorable loss last year. If I have not spoken of it sooner, it was because I would not bring sad subjects to your memory in the first pleasure of our meeting, but all my sympathy is yours. I trust your children are well?"

"I thank you, Joseph," said Augustine. "I knew that your kind heart would feel with me in that bereavement; my poor boys and their sister do sorely miss their mother's care, but they are well, and grief stays not long with the young. Little Jane is with her godmother, Mrs. Marye, in Fredericksburg, and my wife's aunt, Mrs. Kitson, has taken pity on us and makes my house her home at present, but I hope not to be long away. If ever there were conditions which make both master and mistress necessary to a household's welfare they are those of our plantations. What woman can manage bailiffs and factors, slaves and crops, as well as her duties to house and children? What man is not appalled at adding the care of these latter to that of all the former? I never knew before with what profound pity both widows and widowers in our country should be regarded!"

There was a sound of footsteps and voices in the outer room, and in a moment the door was thrown open and Fidelia entered, leading her boy and girl by the hand, all three looking so happy, so healthy and bright, that the dark old room seemed bathed in young sunshine. The children ran to their father, and stood shyly beside him while Mrs. Ball welcomed Mr. Washington, whom she now saw for the first time. In spite of his recent lamentations, Joseph beamed proudly on his little family, and the sight of his happiness sent something like a pang to the heart of his friend, who once more realized his own lonely state. He had already lost two sons and was now in mourning for their mother; but he put aside such selfish thoughts and made haste to ask the questions that parents love to answer, and showed that admiration for the children which every woman believes to be due to hers alone.

The guest lauded Susie's beauty, "by which she comes most righteously, Madam Ball, if you will permit me to say so," he added with a gentle courtliness. And Fidelia, blushing with

pleasure at the double compliment, protested that he would turn the child's head, and sent her off to find Molly and bring her in to join the circle by the fire. Susie, now a lovely child of eight years old, skipped away, her eyes dancing and her fair curls floating behind her, to seek her aunt, who had hung back when the rest went into the room, and then turned and sought her own chamber. It was now some years since she had met Augustine Washington, and though, in the anticipation, this visit had been a source of pleasure, yet, when the time came, she felt unwilling to be hurried into his presence without a moment for preparation. He had told her long ago, in one of the confidential talks which the grown man loved to have with the girl who was still almost a child, that he should expect great and good things from her when she should reach woman's estate.

When Susie came tapping at the door, full of her message that mamma wanted Aunt Molly to come to the parlour this minute, Mary obeyed the summons quietly, and let the little girl lead her downstairs to the drawing-room door. Susie pulled her back just as they reached it and looked up very earnestly in Mary's face.

"Auntie Molly," she whispered, "there's a splendid, handsome gentleman in there, and he said I was very pretty. If he says you are very pretty, will you please promise not to love him better than you love me? You're mine, you know, for always!"

Molly bent down and kissed the eager little face. "Yes, Susie dear, yours for always! Don't be afraid!"

Susie's arms were clasped round her neck in a vehement embrace, and then Molly, with shining eyes and rather disordered hair, entered the room, her small adherent clinging jealously to her hand.

All through her life she remembered that moment. Augustine came forward to greet her, not with stately bows, but with both hands held out to his little comrade of long ago. Shyly she put her hands in his and looked up into his fair, noble face. She had forgotten herself now, but none the less did she feel an overwhelming joy at the look that met hers. Her friend of past years was her friend to-day, and in his eyes was a glad light of truth and kindness which told her that he would be her friend for all the years to come.

CHAPTER II

FOR the next few days Mr. Washington was little at home except in the evenings; his time was spent in ineffectual attempts to obtain an interview with the Prime Minister. Every man to whom he appealed for assistance in this object (and he was well supplied with important introductions) was ready to take his petition in hand, and promised to lay it before Sir Robert Walpole on the earliest opportunity, provided that his services were well paid for beforehand. But the shrewd Virginian had no intention of enriching the place-and-audience mongers without value down, and was willing to take many rebuffs and exercise much patience for the accomplishment of his purpose. So far he had only been able to obtain a glimpse of Sir Robert Walpole as he was entering St. James's Palace for one of his almost daily interviews with the Queen; and the fastidious American had been much disappointed at the coarse and unprepossessing exterior of the famous minister, who at that period held the destinies of the country in his hands. Augustine was a man of one purpose at a time; the business of the moment claimed all his thoughts and energies until it should have definitely succeeded or failed: and although he was glad of the pleasant atmosphere of peace and kindness which he found in Joseph's house after his long days of fruitless visiting and talking, of waiting and disappointment, yet the details of it were, for the time, relegated to the background of his consciousness, and claimed as yet neither analysis nor speculation. Joseph's sympathy, Mrs. Ball's sharp and funny remarks, Mary's silent, intelligent attention, all seemed equally refreshing and necessary at the time: and one evening, when for some reason Mary did not appear in the parlour, he put down the irritation he felt to over-fatigue during the day, and not at all to the absence of the young girl, although he realized how much was gone from the picture when the golden head was not bending over some pretty work in the light of the tall candles near the fire.

"You look tired, Augustine," said Joseph one night. "Why not come down to the country with me to-morrow? The next day will be Saturday, and we can be schoolboys again and take a holiday. It is time I went to look at things at Cookham, and the change will do you good."

"I think it will," said Augustine, brightening at the prospect, "but what doth Madam Ball say? Will she not be incensed at my causing your defection from the domestic circle?" And he looked towards Fidelia, who was knitting industriously at a long pair of hose.

"No, indeed, Mr. Washington," replied the sensible woman, "there's many things we housewives must wait to do till our lords and masters be out of the way for a day or two, and if you and Joseph go to Cookham you can't well get back afore Monday; I'll have the study cleaned out! It's just amazing how a man loves dust and dirt! I couldn't sit there half an hour, the state it's in now, and there's Joseph as happy as you please, and none of us daring to lay a duster to the table nor a mop to the windows, for fear of displacing some rubbish that he hath not seen for a year and would not miss in ten: if it weren't for us poor women, you gentlemen would be buried in dust before your proper time! And above ground at that!"

"We certainly should, madam!" said Augustine laughing, "so if Joseph really wishes it I will accept his most hospitable invitation, and try to keep him away until you are ready for us again!"

"Fidelia," said Joseph earnestly, "if you touch a paper on the middle table or in any of the shelves, I warn you that I'll support the new divorce bill with all my strength! Indeed, I think it would be wiser for me to lock up the room and take away the key."

"Law, Joseph," she returned placidly, "that wouldn't keep me out, for I've another! And as to the divorce bill—I'm thinking it'll be more useful to women than men in the end, so may be you'd better not trouble to support such iniquity!"

"My dear," said Joseph, "if there were more women like you in the world, men would have forgotten how to spell the word that could deprive them of their best treasure!"

Joseph liked to have the last word, and knew that the most certain way to obtain it was by making it a complimentary one.

So, almost before it was light the next morning, the two men started for Cookham, riding two of Joseph's sober nags, and mightily enjoying the sense of freedom as soon as they had left London behind. It was bitterly cold out in the country lanes,

but on the whole the winter had been an open one, and the green mantle, that England never lays quite aside, stretched over the soft rolling hills, just touched with a delicate moisture that was rime on the grass and thin mist in the air, as it were the breath of old Earth as she turns on her side for another sleep in the lengthening days of late winter. i

"'Tis good to be in the saddle again," said Augustine, breathing in the sharp freshness with sentient pleasure; "is there no fox-hunting in this neighbourhood, Joseph? I would rarely love a run with the hounds."

"You may get that yet," replied his companion. "Lord Berkeley hunts a fine pack between this and Bristol."

"Between this and Bristol?" exclaimed the other. "Why, that is long country to cover with a single pack! It must be above a hundred miles, at the shortest!"

"He has various kennels, I am told," Joseph answered, "and the hounds are driven to the nearest at the end of a day's sport. But his is not the only pack you may fall in with, every squire almost keeping a few couple and hunting them as it pleaseth him, which is as often as the poor beasts can be made to run, I take it! It is long since I followed the sport, partly because I have little time for such things at their proper season, partly because my wife does set such fancy value on my ugly neck that the thought of my untimely breaking it causes her the most acute anxiety when I am abroad on such recreation. But I have still a good riding horse at Cookham, that knows well his way about the country. If he have not grown over soft and fat in idleness I hope you will make use of him while we are there."

Augustine was delighted at the aspect of the White House, which, he declared, had a truly colonial air about it; and his first visit was to the stables, where Anthony brightened up at his sympathetic appreciation of the grey, a middle-sized cob with a fine head, straight and well set over a deep chest and splendid shoulders. Augustine walked round and round him, feeling his flat clean legs with a loving hand; and the horse recognized the touch of a master, and never stirred, only throwing his glance back to take stock of the man, and delicately twitching his sharp pointed ears as if he understood the admiration expressed in the few remarks that his new friend made to the pleased groom.

"He is in fine condition, Joseph," said Augustine afterwards; "your man must be a reliable, proper fellow, whom I would like to carry back to Virginia with me! If you will trust me with the horse I will take him out to-morrow!"

"I would trust you with anything that ever was foaled," said Joseph. "You used to be the moral of a rider, and that is an art that a man never forgets. It will do Campus good to have a gallop, and you may fall in with other game than a fox, namely the quarry you have been so unsuccessfully hunting in the town!"

"What, Sir Robert Walpole?" exclaimed Augustine.

"No other," replied his friend. "The man will have his Saturday's run, though kingdoms shake, and hath imposed a forcible holiday on parliament for that purpose! And since Sunday sees him back at his post—for he dare not trust his fate to his enemies for more than twenty-four hours—he cannot go very far afield, whatever the fox may do! So keep your eyes open, and take your luck if it comes."

"Heaven send it come," was Mr. Washington's reply, "but not in the middle of a run! 'Twould be beyond my powers to turn aside for business then!"

Yet such was the sacrifice finally imposed upon him. Rising in the dark, keen as a schoolboy for the sport, he rode out in the direction which Anthony (who had enjoyed many a stolen day's hunting on the cherished grey) pointed out to him as the first where a cover was likely to be drawn that morning. Mr. Washington overtook and passed the time of day with three or four country squires pounding along in the same mind as himself; and they, recognizing the claims of a brother sportsman, made him free of the confraternity at once. It seemed, however, that in spite of early rising some time must have been lost on the road, and when they reached the little wood in the midst of the upland valley which should have been the starting place, their ears caught the sound so dear of the pack in full cry, their eyes saw the beautiful live ribbon of white and black, some fifteen couple of hounds, well in hand, streaming over a ploughed field three fences away.

Augustine knew no more for the next twenty minutes than that he and his grey were one thing, shooting through the ravishing keen air after the only object worth attaining in life. Then came a rise with a straggling hedge atop and a ditch on the take-off side. The grey drew in a little, preparing himself for the leap; they had caught up with the field now. Augustine saw that a horse ahead of him jumped short. There was a crash, a wild whirl of heels in the air, and a heavy thud on the other side. He swerved the grey so as not to trample the prostrate rider and just cleared the hedge, which turned out to have a treacherous ditch on the far side. Ere the grey had caught his stride again,

Augustine saw that a stout man was pulling himself out from under a horse's withers. The field had galloped on. There was no one to help the unfortunate, and the fallen horse did not stir.

Perhaps the second ditch had done it. Augustine was in his own control once more. He pulled the grey round, not without difficulty, and approached the man.

"Hurt?" he cried, stopping a few paces off from an ungainly, fat person who was swearing most obscenely at the fallen animal.

"Hurt be damned," cried the swearer, turning round a furious red face. "I've lost the run! This hell-jade has broken her neck!"

Augustine groaned. The man was Sir Robert Walpole. The hounds had met with some obstacle that was momentarily checking their course at the end of the next field.

"Sir," said Mr. Washington, as he threw his leg over the saddle and dropped to the ground, "take mine!" and he held out the stirrup. The other stared at him in dumb surprise. This was a thing beyond his experience.

"Quick," said Augustine, "they've checked—you'll catch 'em in time!"

"My God!" gasped the astonished minister. Then he scrambled into the saddle and gathered up the reins. "What's your name, sir?" he cried, "Gabriel? Satan? Quick!"

"Washington, at your service!" said Augustine, "send the horse back to the White House, Cookham, and don't break his neck if you can help it!"

The last words had to be shouted, as the stranger was half a field away by this time, but he turned and cried out something that ended with "London!"

Then Augustine set himself to walk home, a triumphant, but raging angry man.

Now Joseph Ball was the most patient of men, but when Augustine, covered with mud, stalked into the dining-room and told him that he had lent his horse to Sir Robert—"and a demned bad rider too," as his irritation prompted him to add, it appeared for a moment as if the form of disagreement known as "explanations" might ensue.

Joseph got very red, and went so far as to say, "Upon my word, Augustine," and then he pulled himself up and was silent.

His friend stood looking at him. "It was absolutely inexcusable," he said, "and as absolutely unavoidable, Joseph. There's no use in my saying I'll replace the animal if Sir Robert injures him, because I know you are fond of Campus, and I've

never put leg over a better goer! But if I have taken an unwarrantable liberty, I believe you'll forgive me, for Old Virginia's sake. She'll get her forges now, as surely as I've lost a fine day's sport! You never saw such a fox! A grand old red fellow, as tough as leather and crafty as the devil! 'Gad, I believe they're running him still!"

"You're a patriot, Augustine, and I'll try to be another!" said Joseph, holding out his hand. "D'ye think I grudge you a lift on the road? Not I! Come, you've not lost your dinner, anyway!"

Campus was returned on Sunday morning, pretty stiff, but having been treated like a gentleman, and with his legs carefully bandaged. The man who brought him brought also a polite note from his borrower, in which it was set forth that Sir Robert Walpole having received from Mr. Washington the greatest kindness that one man can show another, begged that gentleman to take supper with him on Tuesday night in London and receive the thanks which it had been impossible to express at the moment when the favour was conferred.

"What a mind!" exclaimed Joseph, as Augustine showed him the letter. "Here is your name spelt right, your address remembered, when the man had just been badly thrown, and galloped away while you were speaking! I begin to understand the causes of his ascendancy!"

"Campus should be called Vulcan henceforth!" replied Augustine, radiant at the prospect that now opened out before him. "He hath been a kind tutelary deity to our poor ores!"

So a fitting answer was despatched, and then the two friends set themselves to enjoying the easy calm of a country Sunday, with the nearest church five miles away and therefore removed from pressing jurisdiction on their consciences, with the ladies a good deal further off, so that toilets might be made for ease alone and the consolation of pipes, elbow chairs, and feet to the fire, enjoyed to the full.

When Augustine arrived at the small house near Whitehall which was even then the official residence of the Prime Minister, he found to his joy that the great man was alone. Unsuspecting the weighty motives which had influenced his guest, Sir Robert Walpole promised himself an hour's talk over the sport which was the only subject of interest to him after politics and women. Augustine found him in a hot little room, lined and carpeted with crimson, where a huge fire was burning on the hearth. Sir

Robert, who was warming his back at it, came forward cordially as Augustine was announced.

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Washington," he said, extending his hand. "As I can filch but a short hour from the House to-night, we will to supper at once, and I shall drink your health more heartily than I have ever done any man's! Your noble self-denial and splendid nag did give me the finest run of the season!"

"I am overjoyed to hear it, sir!" replied Augustine; "Did you kill? That old fox appeared capable of running all day!"

"One hour and twenty minutes after that check," returned his host. "The sly devil found a stream and ran down it, but we sighted him again and got him near Oxford. I trust your horse was none the worse for the exercise?"

By this time they had entered the dining-room, and were seated at a table so loaded with wines and food that it might have been prepared for ten men rather than for two.

The minister lost no time. Pressing his guest to fall to, he set the example, eating, drinking, and talking, as it seemed, all at once. He had the valuable power of devoting himself to the matter in hand, whatever might be behind or before him, and the matter in hand at this moment was supper. When his appetite was somewhat appeased he glanced across to Augustine and remembered a question he had not yet put.

"You are from over seas, I take it, Mr. Washington?" he remarked, giving himself time to scan his guest's face and person for a moment, and a resulting approval showing itself in his eyes.

"I am, sir," replied Augustine, "but'll be vastly obliged if you will tell me how you discovered the fact!" For as yet he had given no conscious account of himself.

"Demme if I know," returned Sir Robert, "but I do know. You are as English as my grandfather was—a d—d sight Englisher than we are now. When did you come over, 'sir? And, if the inquiry be not an impertinence, what have you come for?"

"I arrived ten days ago," replied Augustine, "and I came—to seek a great man's help for—my mistress!"

"Pretty woman?" inquired Sir Robert, unconcernedly enough, but with a responsive gleam in his eyes.

"The most beautiful mistress that ever man had," said Augustine, "also virtuous, and in great trouble."

"They always are," replied his host, laughing, "when they can't have something they want; and as for virtue, there's but one sort that merits the name—the kind that's properly in love with

the man that desires to subdue it! Is the lady in London? I'd be glad to make the acquaintance of this fair, afflicted American."

"You have heard her name, sir," said Augustine, "and had you seen her, you would find it impossible to refuse her petition."

"Let her come and present it herself," said Sir Robert, "although I assure you, Mr. Washington, that however lovely she may be, she shall not make me forget that I owe you a great private debt of kindness on account of your unexampled courtesy last Saturday! There are scores of men who swear they would lay down their lives for me, but demme if I ever found one before who would give me his horse in the middle of a run!"

"You are too good," replied Augustine, "and the honour of having been able to serve you was an entirely sufficient reward. As for my lady, she cannot present herself in this place, and hath sent me to lay before you the great injustice under which she now suffers, most assuredly without your will! Her name is Virginia, and she asks the most just and powerful statesman in the world to remove certain disabilities which his underlings have laid upon her."

Sir Robert's face had changed so much during this speech that Augustine, looking him straight in the eyes while he was making it, almost asked himself whether this were the same man who had been speaking so cordially just before. First came astonishment, then anger, then a slow withdrawing of all expression and a tightening of the lips and nostrils, which meant self-defence. There was a critical moment when Augustine ceased. He had spoken with profound conviction, and the pleading of his country's cause had brought a fine fire of patriotism into his eyes.

Sir Robert sat silent, looking at the face that met his with such unflinching earnestness. Gradually his own relaxed, the stern glance softened into something like toleration.

"You are a d—d bold man, Mr. Washington!" he said. "What d'you want for your pestilent little colony now?"

Then Augustine knew that his cause was won. With admirable clearness and brevity he laid before his host the leading points of the question, showed how greatly the colonists were suffering from prohibitions which brought no atom of advantage to the mother country, and found courage to ask for permission to institute smithies, as well as forges, for Virginia's ores.

"Hold hard!" exclaimed Sir Robert, "you may ask me for what I can do, but not for what I cannot! Your forges you shall have—and puddle your iron into rods and bars as much as you

like. But I daren't raise an army of infuriated smiths and iron-mongers in England to batter all my measures to death with their hammers! D—n it all, you must send your stuff over here to be made into nails and horseshoes, for the present!"

"Those three words give us hope for the future, sir," said Augustine, "and I thank you in the name of my countrymen for the first concession. We will wait for the rest, and meanwhile——"

"Meanwhile," cried the minister, "it is eight o' the clock, and I must go! Get your papers in order and bring them to me to sign—yes, I'll see you myself, o' Thursday at this same hour! And now good night, my Roman hero—your Virginia deserves well of you, for I wouldn't have listened to a word about the damned little rebel from any other man! An afflicted beauty, forsooth! I am glad there was no one here to see me taken in by your touching story! I should never have heard the last of it!"

It was still early when Augustine reached Gray's Inn Square; Fidelia was upstairs, Joseph in his study, and Mary alone in the drawing-room.

"You have succeeded!" she cried as he entered, his news written on his face. "Oh, but I am glad! We could think of nothing else after you had gone. No one could find it in his heart to refuse you. Tell me all—everything."

"It was all owing to old Campus!" said Augustine, coming forward and standing beside her, looking happier than she had ever seen him before. "To Campus—and your good wishes, I think, Mary!" and Augustine sat down beside her and gave her a full account of the interview, only omitting Sir Robert's profanities and levities. And she listened with clasped hands and joyful, eager eyes.

"Mary," he said, leaning forward and laying his hand on hers, "you said just now that 'none could find it in his heart to refuse me.'"

"Well?" she said looking up, "do you think any one could? You have just had proof that I was right!"

"I want another proof," he said, drawing her hand towards him, and feeling how it began to tremble. "Will you grant me something I am going to ask you? Something far greater and more precious to me than anything else in this world."

"No such thing is mine to grant, Augustine," she murmured. But she knew what he meant. Love and truth had found her at last, and were claiming her for their own,

"Look at me, Mary," he said, for she had turned away her head. "I want to ask you—to come back to Virginia with me."

Bold, simple words, said with such tenderness and affection that no wonder they seemed to her the most thrilling she had ever heard. She was looking at him now, as if questioning of this great happiness. Her heart seemed breaking for new-told joy, crying out in its humility that she was not worthy of such choice.

"Well, dear?" he said, "is it yes? I will not go without you, my Mary!"

"Yours, *yours*?" cried the girl, with flaming cheeks and dewy eyes. "Ah no—I am not good enough! But if I were, oh, if I were!"

"Come!" he said, and opened his arms, and drew her to his heart, and took from her sweet lips their first love-kiss. Even as she gave it she vowed to him that faithfulness which she kept until she died.

CHAPTER III

THE wedding was fixed to take place in March. Augustine would fain have had it sooner, but Fidelia made such a point of keeping Mary till then that he gave way, and Joseph thanked him for not taking the girl away at once.

"It is kind of you, Augustine," he said, "to let my wife have Molly with her at this time. Women set great store by what seem to us trifling things, and Fidelia has so fixed her heart on Molly's being godmother to our next babe that it would grieve her deeply to be disappointed. Also she pretends that there are plenishings and fal-lals that cannot be made ready for a bride under many weeks, and she would not have Molly go to her new house unprovided with all fitting gear! So we will have the wedding at Cookham, and Molly shall christen her new nephew first. Fidelia saith it shall be a boy, and Molly declares she could spell no other name than Augustine for it! See how helpless we poor men are when women and infants are arrayed against us!"

And Augustine laughed his happy laugh and said, "We'll not grudge it 'em, Joseph! God send Molly be christening one of her own next year!"

So as soon as the crocuses began to push their little white and yellow flames above the ground, the family moved down to the White House, and Augustine, still making his headquarters in London, came and went, came gladly and went regretfully, for Mary grew dearer to him every day and the hours went heavily when he was away from her. Beautiful gifts he brought, a great string of pearls that so outshone her old ones that these were laid aside for Susie; two splendid pear-shaped ones for earrings, and these Mary put on with diffidence, thinking them all too splendid for daily wear. And Fidelia gave her linen from her stores and cherished laces worked by patient fingers long ago, and rolls of moyre and tabithy for stately gowns; for now that Molly was to leave her, she felt as if all the patience and kindness the girl had

shown her must be acknowledged and testified unto. Molly was working at a marvellous little christening cap, and would set no stitch for herself till that was done.

Then there came a day of faint March, when "Baby" had to relinquish his sovereignty in favour of a new brother, and every woman in the White House took on an expression of mysterious and lofty importance. Mrs. Price would not suffer old William to say a word above his breath, Anthony was severely scolded for not muffling the horses' hoofs when he took them out for exercise in the avenue. Even Mr. Ball got slight attention to his modest wants; the only person who was allowed to make as much noise as he liked was the new master, who delivered his commands in tones that rang imperiously through the quiet house. Molly, with a new thrill in her gentle bosom, lifted him out of his quaint, carved cradle and brought him to his mother, who was sitting up valiantly against her lace-frilled pillows, rather white, drinking good Mrs. Price's bowl of gruel, but quite content and feeling that she had done everything that could be asked of her. Those were the days when children were still considered as domestic blessings conferring patents of good service to humanity on the women who brought them into the world.

"Here, you sweet plague!" said Mrs. Ball, holding out her arms for her son, just twelve hours old, "see, he knows me already!" she said, as the tiny head nestled against her approvingly, "Law, Molly dear, 'tis great joy to hold a babe again! There's something those poor men'll never know!"

"Nor all it costs!" said Mrs. Price, oracularly, "but he is a beauty, ma'am! And Miss Mary she do hold him as well as I could myself! Now, Mrs. Ball, ma'am, you lie down, and keep quiet, or we shan't have christening nor wedding so soon as we want 'em!"

"Next week, Price," replied Fidelia, stoutly, "christening o' Monday, when this gentleman 'll be eight days old, and wedding o' Thursday, and me in my best gown there too! Oh, Molly, whatever am I going to do without you, you heartless girl?"

The new master was christened on the Monday, exactly as his mamma had intended, and Augustine came down to stand as godfather and to feel his heart go out anew to Mary, who looked so tender and kind as she held the little man in her arms beside the table, where the great silver punch bowl served as font. The old parson who performed the ceremony was no whit scandalized at its new use, though he had many a comforting glass served out to him from its depths. As he gave the child back to its

godmother, and she took it in her young arms and let its head lie against her breast, the man who would make her his wife, and mother to his children, thought she had never seemed so beautiful, and all that he knew of the service was the cry of his own heart, "God bless her, God bless her!"

When it was all over she came out to him in the garden, where the soft spring day was drawing to an end, its faint blossoms closing their petals to grow stronger in to-morrow's sunshine, its birds twittering happily over the year's first brood.

"Now you are for me," said Augustine, "they have had you to the last, Mary, and I have tried not to be jealous, seeing how much I am taking from them. But now it must be you and me, my girl!" and he drew her arm through his and led her down the path towards the river.

She was silent, leaning towards him in a peace she would not mar with words. But when they reached the terrace and stood by the stone balustrade above the water, she drew her arm away and straightened herself, and looked at him.

"Well?" he said, as he had said on the night of their betrothal by the firelight. She did not smile now. There was a look of pain in her clear eyes.

"Augustine," she said, very low, very unwillingly, "there is something that I must tell you. Pray, pray do not let it make you love me less."

"Nothing can do that," he answered, quickly, but she saw anxiety leap into his eyes. He had not dreamed she could have anything to hide from him.

"What is it?" he asked, almost roughly, for he could see that she was needing all her courage to speak.

"You must judge of what it was," she said, with evident effort. "This is what happened, and it is right that you should know. Oh, do not make it harder for me!" she pleaded, for his face had become stern, like the face of a man who nerves himself to meet a blow.

"Go on, Mary," he said, and the words were a command.

"It is two, nearly three years ago," she said, looking away from him so as not to lose strength to speak, "a man—wanted to marry me—Joseph urged me to accept him. He was not good, he frightened me, and, when God was near, I felt it all and would have sent him from me. But—oh, how shall I say it? Sometimes——"

It was hard to go on. Augustine had turned from her, but she could hear his short, deep breathing.

"Sometimes," she went on desperately, more loyal to her truth than to his ease, "I felt drawn to him. I told myself it was pity, but it was not. It was his love, I think. The strength of it seemed to call me. There was a day, here, in this very spot, when he said wild things, and caught at my hands, and my dress, and I felt as if something terribly strong, far stronger than myself, were dragging me down to him, and I stooped—he was kneeling, here—and I believe I would have—kissed him. But people came, we were separated—and then I sent him away."

There was silence for a moment. The water lapped against the stones and a little breeze stirred the trees. At last Augustine spoke, but his face was turned away from her.

"Is that all?" he asked. The pain in his voice robbed the question of brutality.

"I sent him away," said Mary, in the low voice that had truth's own ring in it, "I knew it then, it was made clear to me that I must never be for him. And Joseph was sorry, and after a time Robin——" Augustine had raised his head angrily as she spoke the name, and she went on quickly, "Lord Drumardlee, I mean, came back, and I did in a manner deceive myself to believe that it was my duty to listen to him. He had no more power over me then—oh, it was all gone, but I was so sorry for him; the man seemed banned, alone, with none to care or help. So at last I said yes——"

"Oh, have done!" cried Augustine, turning an anguished face to hers. "Did he kiss you, did he kiss you?" Primeval man was very strong in Augustine Washington.

"He kissed my hands," said Mary, white to the lips, "and in the same hour Joseph sent me the command never to see him again. I know not of what he was guilty. Then I came and spoke to him, begged him to repent and amend, and I am glad I did. Had you been there to forbid it, I should have done the same, and I have never seen him since. May God have mercy on him!"

Mary stood mute, scorning to utter one word of pleading for herself. But she could not bear to read his pain, and dropped her eyes and waited.

True love leapt back, laughing to his throne. Augustine came close to her—

"My Mary," he said, "you are a thousand times too good for me. I thank you for your sweet courage, and may God indeed have mercy on the poor wretch that lost you—to me!"

That twenty-first of March rose fair and bright, a day of true

spring in the soft Thames valley. The primroses and violets were all in bloom, starring the green ribbons of grass along the hedges; the trees, faint and feathery still, threw up a shimmer of rose green gold from branch to branch; the catkins of the willows by the river were bursting into leaf, and far across deep meadows came cuckoo notes to ring in the spring, and calls of thrush and blackbird, tender and elusive still, because of the youth of the year. Early roses were blooming in the garden, all the colours of the dawn, white and gold and palest pink; the proud crimson ones waited for the summer, but there was a fair array of faint sweetnesses to greet Mary on her marriage morn. How many times are we born into life? Is not each great change a birthday new, leaving the time that runs before it vague and formless almost as prenatal unconsciousness, flinging us into new joys, new conflicts, new growth? We carry the heredity of our former years upon us, even as we carry the strengths and weaknesses of our progenitors; and when the period closes at last, its needs and results are buried with it, and we, the immortals, leap out into the next, new men and women as the time demands. No mouldering ancestor is more dead than the self we have done with, no new-born child more at the mercy of the future than we on the morning of each fresh birth.

And as birth is the mother of tears as well as smiles, so Mary woke on her wedding-day with a wetness on her cheek, with two small arms flung round her neck, and a sound of lamentation in her ears.

"Why, Susie, child, what is it?" she said, when she realized that the little girl was sobbing on her shoulder. "Don't cry, dearie! You must not cry to-day!" And she drew the crumpled little bundle into her arms, and kissed the hot, wet cheeks.

"Oh, Aunt Molly," said Susie, incoherently, "you are going away from me, and my heart is all broke! That wicked, bad, unkind Mr. Washington is going to take you quite away, and I—I want to kill him!"

"Susie, dear," said Molly, "I am going to love you always just the same. There'll never be anybody like my little Susie! And by-and-by you shall come and see me, and we will be so happy together!"

"Bys-and-bys don't never come," moaned Susie, with sad conviction; "it's the to-days that matter, and this to-day is most dreadful! Why should big men come like tigers, and carry lambs away into the wilderness? Won't you please change your mind, Aunt Molly? I'll never, never be naughty again if you'll only stay!"

"You are never naughty, Susie," said Molly; "but you must not call poor Mr. Washington unkind names. In a few years, sweetheart, you will understand why Aunt Molly, who loves you so dearly, must leave you now. We all have our places kept for us, so patiently, so kindly; and when the call comes, why, we must go and fill them, you know!"

"I know you love him better than me," cried Susie, "and you promised you wouldn't!"

"It is not 'better,' little one," murmured Mary, "it—it is another love, a beautiful new tree growing up beside the old ones, and there's room and sunshine for them all."

Then Susie grew quieter, and nestled close to her goddess in the great, white bed, and the flaxen curls mingled with the golden ones for awhile, till the sun rose, gallant and glorious, and shot laughing beams across the pillow.

"We'll say our prayers together for the last time, Susie," whispered Molly. And they both slipped down on the floor, and knelt side by side and said their morning prayers in simple reverence, the woman's heart as white as the child's.

"Now, sweet, run off, and let Nancy dress you," said Mary, when they rose. "See, you shall wear my necklace to-day."

And she brought her first string of pearls and clasped them round the little plump neck, where they hung loose enough for Susie to contemplate them with a joyful effort.

"I really suppose I am grown up, now!" she exclaimed, as she caught sight in the glass of her own funny little figure in its white shift crowned by a tangle of flaxen hair, and the pearls shining out bravely in the sun. "Well, I'll try to behave so—if I must!"

Fidelia's strength was not yet equal to the long drive to the Parish Church, so Mary and Augustine were married in the drawing-room of the White House, at midday, with the windows opening to the garden, and a thousand bird-songs singing their wedding-hymn. Augustine, very splendid, in a coat of dark blue velvet, silver laced waistcoat, and white satin breeches, was kept waiting the inevitable quarter of an hour, during which the women were bestowing parting touches on the finery of the bride. He and Joseph talked disjointedly to the parson, and to the one or two friends invited from town, and Augustine kept looking at the door and showed a nervousness and impatience which sat strangely on his usually bright and confident face.

At last William threw the doors open with a flourish, and Mary entered, accompanied by Fidelia, and followed closely by

Susie in a little stiff-waisted gown of pink silk. The maids all crowded in behind them, flushed and tearful, as right-minded women should always be at a wedding.

Augustine's face lighted up at the sight of his wife to be, and he stepped forward to meet her and kiss her hand with the grace of a conqueror. She looked very lovely in her gown of white brocade flowered with blue forget-me-nots and pink roses, she was uncrowned save by her beautiful golden hair, her eyes were deeper than the forget-me-nots, and her cheeks a little fainter than the roses. Her only ornaments were Augustine's pearls, and a breast-knot of white rosebuds, as fair as the neck against which they lay.

Joseph led her to her place, and the white-haired minister began the service. When Augustine took her hand in his to place the precious ring on her finger he felt that that fair and gentle hand would be his dearest, faithfullest servant. To him the ceremony was a feast, to her a sacrament.

The rose flush flamed into her cheeks again, when it was over and he kissed her proudly before them all. Then there were congratulations and embracings, Susie forgiving Augustine so far as to whisper to him defiantly, "Aunt Molly's going to love me same as ever, Mr. Washington, and I'm to wear her frock when I get married!" Upon which Augustine lifted her up in his arms and kissed her and said, "Try to put as sweet a maid inside it, niece!" Then Susie looked at him with pleased possession and said she "hadn't remembered she was going to have a nice, new uncle!" and peace was declared on the spot. And the punch bowl was put to its proper use this time. By-and-by the good parson went home without marking much how he got there, while the little party at the White House grew grave, because Mary and Augustine must go up to London that night in the great family coach, and embark next day on the *Fortuna*, for the good ship could wait no longer for lovers and weddings, but must spread its wings for flight to the distant, distant West.

"Molly," said Fidelia, as she clasped and kissed her for the last time, "there's a many things before thee, child, and I do pray they be all good and happy ones—but remember—'twill come strange from me, but remember—whatever thy man doth or doth not, saith or leaves unsaid, there's only one way for wife to hold husband—forgive, forgive, *forgive!*"

"That'll never be asked of me, sister!" said Molly. And then they put her into the coach, and Augustine sprang in beside her, and William, proud as a duke, climbed up on the rumble,

and Mr. and Mrs. Washington started out together on life's journey, leaving a solemn, tearful party on the doorstep of the White House.

Molly looked back out of the window at the turn in the avenue, and waved her hand. The big, fat horses swerved, then cleared the curve, and she sank back in her place beside her husband.

"Hast done with thy farewells, sweet?" he asked. "Now to my heart, wife!" And he took her in his arms.

CHAPTER IV

WAKING on a June morning in the narrow ship's cabin that had been through storm and sunshine such a nest of happy thoughts and loving intercourse for two months and more, she sat up suddenly, summoned by some wordless sweetness in the air. The water was rushing by the ship's side as it had rushed for many a day, not always so gently as it did on this morn of June, but it sang some song it was not singing yesterday: overhead she could hear taut cordage creaking and strong sail talking in the wind; the vessel's lift and leap as it danced along seemed more triumphant, more instinct with life than it had ever been before; and through the tiny porthole over Mary's head, where the sky shone a liquid round of turquoise shot with diamond, came the heavenly breath of hayfields in flower, forests in leaf, the smell of summer morning in the fairest country in the world.

Augustine was still asleep in his narrow berth. Mary looked across at him, and paused even then to note the splendid calm of the face that had nothing to fear from sleep's betrayals. He half awoke and murmured drowsily—

"Mary, wife! I was dreaming of you!"

"Dream again, love," she said. And he smiled and closed his eyes once more and slept till she was dressed, for Mary would never let him move till her own dainty toilet was over.

She hurried it to-day, eager to climb the stairway to the deck and see what the world held for her. The porthole still showed nothing but laughing sky, and once, as the course was changed, the sheen of a dipping sail far overhead. At last she slipped out, her scarlet, hooded cloak thrown over her shoulders, and found the stair and reached the deck. As she emerged from the low doorway into the morning, she gave a cry of delight and ran to the bulwark and stood there, gazing at the lovely sight that met her

eyes. The *Fortuna* was right in the waterway of the Chesapeake. On either side, across the dimpling blue of the bay, rose lovely hills wooded to the water's edge and smiling in the broad glory of the risen sun. Tiny islands, feathered with green, each a little Eden of verdure, floated on the blue, like branches flung out in greeting on the waves; here and there a white rock, all molten in the sun, divided the leafy fringes of the woods, and seemed to draw their skirts back to show a stretch of dun or silver sand, kissed by gentle wavelets touched to tender gold. Now came a break in the foliage, and broad fields rolled away towards the uplands, deep in feathery grasses waiting for the scythe. The breeze and tide were carrying Mary's vessel swiftly on, and now above the wind-song in the sails and the ripple-song of the prow came a thousand notes of birds, oriole and blue-bird, thrush and finch and linnet, bursting their little throats in the recurring ecstasy of day.

"My God!" said Mary in her heart, "and this is home!"

"A fine morning, Mrs. Washington," said Captain Jones, stepping to her side, "an' the breeze but holds, we'll land you and the master on your own wharf by sundown."

"I had forgotten how beautiful it all is," said Mary, turning to the old sailor, who had shown such constant attention to her comfort during the long voyage. Mr. Washington was the owner of the *Fortuna*, and Captain Jones was mighty proud of being her skipper.

"Beats England, don't it, ma'am?" remarked the captain. "They talk about their white cliffs, but to my mind there ain't a port on earth like this one! Never a puff of wind too much or too little, smooth, deep water, and enough land to keep you sober in the fear of God! Up yonder in the Potomac seems as if it looked so pretty just to make you forget your bearings and run into it where you'd better not! But I know it, bless you! Never ran into a shoal or a rock yet!"

"You've been in and out often, have you not?" said Mary, a little anxiously.

"This makes thirteen," replied he, "and you being on board, Mrs. Washington, we'll call it the lucky number! I was going to misremember and mark it my fourteenth trip, till I saw the sort of weather you was bringing us, ma'am!" And he laughed nervously.

"We had one or two storms, though," said Mary, with a vivid recollection of a week in mid-ocean when she had not been allowed on deck for more than a few minutes at a time, clinging to Augustine's arm in a world of grey, tossing wetness.

"Not to call storms," replied the old captain, "just a bit of a blow, so to speak. It's done you a power of good, you don't look the same maid—I mean lady—we took on that day in Greenwich."

"I suppose I am very brown?" Mary inquired. "I hope they will not be shocked at my appearance when I get to Wakefield!"

"You are a bit browner, ma'am," he answered bluntly, "but your cheeks are like the dog-roses you're going to find in the hedges up there, and you look as if you could take command of a fleet! It's wonderful what two or three months at sea'll do for a healthy young woman."

Mary laughed. She had never felt so strong and confident in her life.

"Do you know Wakefield?" she asked. "I have never seen the place."

"It's fine!" declared Captain Jones with deep conviction. "I've often spent a night there when we were loading up for Mr. Washington. Big house, well back from the river—you can see all the ships sail by—good, square rooms with plenty of light, cool in summer, warm in winter, and presses and lockers everywhere, to stow your gear away in. Sort of house a poor sailor like me dreams of and 'll never have! As for the land—well, I'm not much of a judge of that, but they say it's the best in Virginia, so I take it that means the best in the world. Ah, you're a lucky girl, my dear—I beg your pardon for calling you that, but I can't help it!"

"You must come and see me deserve my luck!" said Mary, smiling at the old man's enthusiasm. "I shall never forget you brought me to my home, Captain Jones. And no one will be more welcome there than yourself."

"Now I take that very kind of you," he answered, "and I'll remember the invitation till you bid me forget it. Say, ma'am, do you know Mrs. Kitson, Mr. Washington's aunt, that's been taking care of it for him?"

"No," said Mary, "but I shall—to-night, I hope!" and she laughed happily.

"I seen her once," remarked the captain, dubiously. "Taking her to Baltimore, I was. Seemed a mighty capable woman. Kind of wanted to take command of the ship—till we got into open water. Then she was fairly quiet. I wasn't sorry."

Augustine now joined them, and the captain went forward to give some orders.

"Tell me about Aunt Kitson," said Mary to her husband. "I hope—do you think—she will approve of me, Augustine?" and she looked up at him rather anxiously.

"She will never say so if she does," he replied, smiling at her evident apprehension. Has Captain Jones been talking to you of her? She did not approve of the weather he provided when she had to sail with him, and I fear she hath never forgiven the oversight. She will love you dearly, Molly, as every one must. Have no fear, my dear!"

Mary was silent for a moment, then she asked another question. "Will Aunt Kitson always live with us, Augustine?"

"Only as long as my dear wife wishes it," he said, pressing the hand that lay on his arm. "She is not young, she is childless and a widow, and has but a very small fortune. So she will leave us when my beautiful kind Mary desires her departure."

"She will never leave us," said Mary, hotly. "Why, Augustine, I would never deprive the poor lady of her home! But, dearest, we shall have our quiet hours alone together, shall we not?"

"You need not ask that question, sweetheart, knowing how precious they are to me," he replied.

And Mary turned and kissed the shoulder of his coat. It was a little loving way she had when she was standing beside him. Tall as she was, her pretty head just reached that spot.

It was after sundown when at last the *Fortuna* drew in to the wharf where she was accustomed to lie for her cargo of cotton and tobacco. The summer day had died in tender amethyst behind the soft hills, the woods were velvety with coming darkness, and the keen scent of flowers and grasses was piercingly sweet. A few faint stars shone out overhead, and Mary, breathless with expectation, saw beyond the rising lawns all misty with the first dews, her husband's home, its dark roof-tree sharp against the sky, where the crescent moon hung just above it, a silver sickle in the purple depths. Lights shone like friendly eyes from the broad windows, and ere the ship had dropped her anchor, the arrival of the master had been proclaimed, and a little crowd was gathered on the landing-place.

Mary found herself surrounded by smiling negroes, all anxious to get the first glimpse of the new mistress. Augustine had almost disappeared in the wild embraces of his boys, and, when he could extricate himself, turned to Mary, with one arm round each. For one instant she felt a pang of jealousy of the dead woman who had given him the bonny lads, then she was stooping to kiss their

fair young faces, so like his. They hung back shyly for a moment. Then delight beamed in their eyes.

"Papa!" cried Lawrence, "this is not a mamma! She is nothing but a sister!"

"Oh, I am glad," whispered Augustine the younger, "we thought you would be quite old, ma'am!" And he put up his rosy face and kissed her of his own accord.

"Come, sweetheart," said Augustine, "we'll in—the servants will see to the gear." And he took her hand and led her up the grassy walk to the house. On the lowest step he paused, turned, and kissed her lovingly. "Welcome, dear wife!" he said, and then they all went in together.

In the hall lights were burning, and a grey-haired woman came forward to meet them. She was dressed in sombre hues, and her white cap was of starched severity; there was a hectic flush of excitement in her thin cheeks, and not much kindness in her vigilant eyes.

"Welcome home, nephew!" she said, as Augustine kissed her hand. "So this is your new wife? Mrs. Washington, I am very glad to see you. I hope you will be happy with us!" And Mary received a guarded kiss on either cheek.

She could find nothing to say for a moment, being occupied in wondering whether she were guest or mistress. Then she collected her wits, and made a pretty speech to the effect that she was fortunate in making at last the acquaintance of her husband's loved and respected kinswoman, and that Aunt Kitson must please look upon her as a dutiful niece who would do her best to make her glad of the relationship.

"Molly, thou art that marvellous jewel, a fair woman with the wits of a wise man," said Augustine afterwards. Supper, for which the little boys had been permitted to sit up, was over, and husband and wife were alone in the sanctuary of their chamber. "Thou didst find the only thing to say which Aunt Kitson wanted to hear, and she hath but now declared to me that my choice meets with her approval, she confessing that my Molly does appear to be a healthy young woman who has had a vastly proper bringing up!"

"I am rejoiced, Augustine," said Molly, simply.

Tired for very happiness, Mary fell asleep at last in the great, silent room, the recesses of which she would explore to-morrow. After months at sea it was strange, yet enchanting, to sink into the big, white bed, as large as her whole cabin in the *Fortuna*. The world was still hardly steady around her, and when sleep came it brought dreams of swaying wings and swan-white downiness and

weird, sweet songs. She woke once with a start, thinking that she was back at Cookham with Susie's head on the next pillow. But a dearer than Susie was there.

"I am glad to see that you are an early riser, niece!" said Mrs. Kitson the next morning, as she and Mary met on the first landing of the staircase that came up in wide, shallow steps from the hall. It was just seven o'clock, and the greater part of the household had been astir since five.

"I call this late, ma'am," replied Mary, saluting her a little timidly. "At home—in England, I mean, sister Fidelia and I had to be dressed by six o'clock if the day's work should be well begun. Can I be of any use to you in preparing breakfast?"

"I thank you," returned Aunt Kitson, not without a note of defiance in her tone, "that is already done." And she led the way to the dining-room, whence came sounds of scuffle and debate. Mary followed her meekly: she was reserving her energies for taking possession of the urn, feeling that unless she did so this morning her rightful throne behind it could never be reclaimed.

Fortune assisted her in the conquest. Holding open the door for Aunt Kitson to pass in, she beheld the two boys inextricably mixed up in the attempt to take possession of the seat next to the one which had been assigned to her the night before. Beyond it was Augustine's, and there only remained the place behind the urn, and a solitary chair on the opposite side of the table.

"I'm the eldest," cried Lawrence, vigorously pomelling the younger brother, who was trying to dislodge him. "Go away, I must have the seat next to our new mamma!"

"Well, you shan't! She promised me!" returned his brother, trying to pull the chair from under him.

Then they became aware of the entrance of the ladies, and jumped shamefacedly to their feet, casting anxious glances at Aunt Kitson's displeased countenance. That lady had halted a few paces away, and began to rebuke the young litigants very severely. Mary longed to go and kiss their flushed faces, but she was too good a general not to seize the advantage offered by the disturbance. She stepped at once to the head of the table, and sat down behind the great silver urn which was to her the symbol of her sovereignty. From there she spoke.

"Pray, aunt, forgive the children this time. I fear I am the cause of their dispute, having promised both that they should sit beside me this morning, as indeed they may, an' they'll be good now."

Three astonished faces were turned towards her. Mrs. Kitson

who had been about to box Augustine's ears, let her hands fall nerveless at her sides, and the two boys flew from her to occupy the places indicated by Mary's change of position.

"I will see to the urn, Mrs. Washington," said Aunt Kitson, advancing with battle in her face.

"Surely, dear aunt, that is Mrs. Washington's duty," returned Mary, with beating heart but steady glance. "Lawrence," she continued, turning to the boy, "are you not going to pull out Aunt Kitson's chair for her. And you, Augustine, run upstairs and ask your father if it be his wish that we wait breakfast for him."

Then she folded her arms and looked out of the window. The battle was won. When Augustine entered the room with his little son five minutes later, a look of delight and amusement came into his eyes. He had foreseen the conflict, and, with true masculine wisdom, had remained absent until it should be decided. Mrs. Kitson returned his greeting very stiffly. When William, happier than he had ever hoped to be again, brought in the first relay of hot cakes from the kitchen, his old face beamed with satisfaction at beholding his beloved Miss Mary enthroned as the mistress of her new household. Aunt Kitson had nothing to complain of in the way of polite attention, and Mary's deferential manner made her feel that the position of queen dowager might offer compensations for diminished jurisdiction.

When the meal was over, and the boys, who seemed but children still, were permitted the treat of taking their fruit and corn-cake out to finish in the garden, Augustine the elder invited his wife to take a stroll round the grounds. He anticipated a keen delight in showing her the beauties of the place. But Mary withstood the temptation.

"Let me come with you a little later," she said, "when I have seen to the household matters, dear husband. Aunt Kitson is going to take me to the store-room and the kitchen, and she will kindly tell the servants that they must be more diligent than in common, seeing that the new housekeeper is yet somewhat inexperienced. But her aunt's valued advice will soon remedy that defect, I trust." And she smiled sweetly at Mrs. Kitson as she spoke.

"As you will, Molly," said Augustine; "we will take our walk after dinner if it suit you."

When the family met at that meal, Molly wore a new ornament, of which, to tell the truth, she was inordinately proud. It consisted of a long, steel chain, to which was attached a huge bunch of clumsy keys, and she felt that their pleasant jingle doubled the

dignity of her wedding-ring. Aunt Kitson had a headache and would not eat; but Molly assured Augustine, in an aside, that their good relative would have recovered her appetite by supper-time.

When the busy day wore on to afternoon, Mary felt more tired than she had done for many months. And the fatigue evidenced a fear lest she should not prove equal to the task she had taken upon herself. She knew that she had been right in assuming it at once: to have let things go on precisely as they had done before her arrival, even had they been well managed, would have involved laying down all claims to future rule, and Mary had clear ideas as to her responsibilities and tasks in that direction. But things had not been well managed.

Mary was jingling her keys despondently as she looked at the overloaded shelves, and was mentally deciding to have a grand turn-out, and start on a general clearing the next day, when she was aware of William, solemn and concerned, at her elbow.

"What is it, William?" she asked, turning quickly towards him.

"Miss Mary," he said confidentially, "you better run right away and take off dat big apron and get out de best china. Dere's a coach comin' along through de plantation, an' de gals say it's Mr. Washington's sister come to see you! 'Bout five minutes more dey'll get here, and I s'pose dey'll stay some nights."

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed the anxious little housewife. "I never thought of this! Visitors already, and the house in such a condition! What shall I do?" And tears of vexation stood in her eyes. The cares of dominion were crowding all too fast upon her, poor child, and she suddenly felt her own weakness, and regretted the deposition of Aunt Kitson.

"Law, missy," said William, "if you goin' to take things dis way you die in a week! Why, all plantations is 'zactly de same! Don't you fuss yourself now! Dere's plenty of victuals for visitors to eat, and plenty of darkies to wait upon 'em, and I guess Mis' Gregory ain't goin' to sleep in dis ole store-room! You run along and get ready to talk pretty, and William 'll see to all de rest!"

"Do your best, William," she implored. "I have not time to give a single order."

"You needn't, honey," said the old man; "just let me have dose keys till supper-time, and we'll have everything done same as Mrs. Ball had, *there!*"

So Mary hastily tore off her insignia, and gave the keys into his faithful hands. By the time the coach drew up at the door,

she was standing in the porch, smiling and serene again, ready to welcome Augustine's sister.

But when the huge yellow coach, on its swinging straps, finally halted with a lurch before the steps, there was no strange face at the window, but the well-loved countenance of Mrs. Bonurn, the adored half-sister of her childish years.

"Elizabeth!" cried Mary, and the next moment she was enfolded in the elder woman's motherly arms; and Elizabeth was saying, "Why, Molly child, didst think I would not be the first to welcome thee home?"

"But such a distance! Oh, who could have expected you so soon, dear, dear Elizabeth?" cried Molly, between tears and laughter. "Augustine promised to bring me to you next week, but this is almost too good to be true!"

"Nay," said Elizabeth, "you must never say anything is too good to be true! Here are Sally and Kitty, waiting to hug their old playmate!"

Mrs. Bonurn had married many years before, and her daughters were but little junior to Mary. They came forward now, fair, rosy girls brown-eyed and laughing, to claim a share of their girl-aunt's attention.

"Why, Sally," exclaimed Molly, looking at the younger one, "you have outgrown your aunt, you disrespectful child!"

"But you got married first, Molly dear," said the girl, kissing her. "You know I always said you and Kitty would have to dance in green stockings at my wedding. Now there'll be only Kitty, and she vows she won't wear 'em alone."

"Is this baby going to be married?" laughed Molly. "Dear, dear, what is the world coming to? I feel like a grandam already. Come in and tell me all about it. I want to ask five thousand questions, Elizabeth, and you and the girls must stay with me at least a month to answer them."

So they all went indoors, and while the servants, as a matter of course, carried the cumbersome portmanteaux to the spacious guest-rooms on the upper floor, there was a happy party of women in the parlour, talking all together, laughing so gaily that Aunt Kitson in her bedroom decided to dismiss her headache, put on her best cap, and go downstairs to join in their diversion. Molly had not once thought of dusty larders or perplexed cooks, and all her cares vanished at sight of the kind smiling faces of her own people. She had armed herself to meet critics, and Heaven had sent her allies.

When Aunt Kitson joined the circle the talk became less

intimate, and Augustine and the boys coming in soon after, Mary felt almost as if she were holding a levée for the first time. When at last she led her guests away to prepare for supper, she drew Elizabeth into her own room, and made her sit down for a few minutes of quiet talk.

"I cannot tell you," said Mary, "what this visit does bring me of comfort, sister. A few hours ago I was the most doleful, discouraged young woman in the world. Now you will help me over all my difficulties."

"How many have you found in a day and a night, my dear?" inquired Elizabeth, smiling. She was a sweet-tempered, capable woman, with plenty of energy for the struggles of life, but of an unruffled placidity in meeting with them.

Then Mary told her the history of her day, the impression of general disorganization she had received; how she had insisted upon taking up the reins of government, and how many little difficulties had already arisen to disturb her.

"You will not remember one of them in a week, Molly," said Elizabeth. "It is always the same here in Virginia. A plantation house is a palace or a pigstye, according to the capacity of the woman who rules in it! Leave the negroes to themselves, and you will never have a bed fit to sleep in, or a meal fit to eat; direct them, and they will give you the best service in the world. I will help you while I am here, child, and when once things are rightly ordered you need never have another moment's trouble."

"Oh, Elizabeth," said Molly, "what friend is like a sister? I was going to battle it out all alone, for I had resolved that Augustine should never hear a complaint from me."

"A wise resolve, my dear, and I hope you will keep to it," was Elizabeth's reply. "The fairest home in the world becomes distasteful to a man if he have its concerns dinned into his ears from morning till night. He reigns, like a monarch, the happy creature, but 'tis poor prime minister wife who must govern."

CHAPTER V

MRS. BONURN and her daughters remained at Wakefield for a week, a visit which was considered almost unkindly short in that land of unending hospitalities. Before they had been there two days, Mrs. Gregory, Augustine Washington's sister, arrived, with her eldest daughter, a pretty little maid of ten, to welcome the bride, and the house rang with young footsteps, young voices, from morning till night. Mrs. Marye came over from Fredericksburg, bringing her god-child, Jane, to greet her father and make the acquaintance of her young stepmother. Mary would gladly have kept the gentle girl at Wakefield, but Mrs. Marye pleaded that she had no children living with her, and that she would be sadly lonely without Jenny, who had, even during her mother's lifetime, spent many months of the year with the sweet woman who was destined much later in life to be Mary Washington's dearest friend. Jenny was inclined to be delicate, and Mary appreciated the motives which had led Augustine to place her under the care of Mrs. Marye, rather than under Aunt Kitson's sharp rule, during his stay in Europe.

The only elderly influence in the bright circle came from Mrs. Kitson, who had some moods when she was much inclined to stand on her dignity, and others when she would tearfully declare that she was only a poor relation, in everybody's way, and that the time was approaching when she would go, and they'd be sorry, she hoped! These moods came on just when Mary, having done all that in her lay to be polite and kind, felt that Aunt Kitson was pacified, and could safely be left alone for a short time, while the young hostess devoted herself to her other guests, or had a quiet hour with her beloved Elizabeth in the garden. There was so much that the two sisters wished to relate and discuss, and then there was Augustine, who would sometimes come and carry his wife off for the whole afternoon to some distant part of the plantation, for the mere pleasure of having her to himself.

He was pleased to see her taking her part so well ; but Fidelia had judged him rightly when she prophesied that he would not wish to share her society with relatives for ever.

One afternoon when Sally Bonurn and her sister Kitty were perched on Molly's great bed, Elizabeth sitting by the window in a rocking-chair (even then dear to the southern heart), and Mary, looking rather tired, was standing by the tall press, seeking some London finery that she wanted to give the girls, Sally spoke her mind.

"Molly," she said, cocking her head on one side ; "Oh, you need not try to look severe. I am not going to call you aunt, if you *are* Mrs. Washington. Aunt Kitson is a CAT, and you'll have to get rid of her !" This was delivered with an air of vicious finality and determination.

"Sally," exclaimed her mother, much shocked, "I am amazed at you ! That is a most improper way of speaking of an elderly lady."

"Cats are cats, even when they are old," continued Sally, who, as a betrothed young woman, had begun to take maternal reproofs with happy levity. "They scratch as fierce as ever, even when they are as old as Methuselah ! She was just villainous to-day about that flummery, turning up her ugly old nose, and pretending it wasn't fit to eat !"

"It was beautiful," said gentle Kitty, who was swinging her little high-heeled shoes over the edge of the bed. "I had two helpings, and I was going to ask for another, only I saw mamma's eyes upon me, and was afraid you would all think me too monstrous greedy !"

"You are, love," said Sally, with sisterly frankness ; "but I had two helpings too, just to spite Aunt Kitson. Oh dear, if ever I turn into a thing like that I hope Mr. Carter will do away with me before other folk find it out !"

"He will be very sadly surprised at you, Sarah," said Mrs. Bonurn, "if you let him hear you talk in that rude manner ! Aunt Kitson is rather trying, I confess, but it only shows our dear Molly's patience and gentleness in a finer light."

"I fear I have little left to-night, Elizabeth," exclaimed Mary, coming forward with her hands full of laces and ribbons. "Here, Sally, let these smother your naughty talk, you pert little upstart !" and she threw the pretty things over the girls, who gave a simultaneous scream of delight, and looked for a moment like dainty monuments of mad frivolity.

"Send these children away, Molly," said Elizabeth, smiling at

the aspect of her daughters with many-coloured ribbons streaming all over them, laces flung on their curly heads, and their laps full of artificial flowers. "I want to talk to you, my dear!"

"That is all very well, mamma," cried Sally, clearing some yards of pink ribbon from before her eyes; "but there is one thing I must say before I go—Mrs. Kitson does wickedly hate our sweet Molly, and will do her some spite! She told me to-day that Augustine already regrets the time of his dear Jane, and will do so more bitterly soon! And I told her that it was a falsehood, and that he was more likely to wish that Jane had taken her aunt with her. And then Molly came in, asking so kind after *poor* Aunt Kitson's headache, and I wanted to kill the old——"

"Toad" was probably what fiery Sally intended to say, but the word was not said, because her mother came and lifted her off the bed as if she had been a baby, put her outside the door, and turned the key on her. Kitty laughed, and, gathering up the spoils, prepared to follow.

"Best let me go, too, mamma," she said; "I will offer to dress her hair with some of these flowers, and remind her that Ned Carter may be riding over to-night, and won't think her the prettier for red eyes!"

"You are a good girl, Kitty," said her mother. "Yes, run after Sally and let not Mary hear any more of such unkind gossip. 'Twill do none of us any good."

When the door closed upon Kitty, Elizabeth returned to Mary, who was standing by the window, her back to the room. Elizabeth laid a kind arm round her shoulder, and drew Mary's head to rest there as it had often done before.

"Take no notice, child," she said. "You would not be human if you were not a little angry; but put it away and tell yourself that that poor old woman does but envy you as a starveling envies a king! I would you were not forced to have her live here, but there seems no help for it."

"Elizabeth," said Molly, looking up, "when Sally was naughty just now, you put her out of the room. Aunt Kitson may be as disagreeable as she likes, so long as she can be cross like a gentlewoman and does not make trouble for us by her lies and spite. When she does that, I shall think it time to follow the spirited example you set me a few minutes since!"

A little determined line came out on either side of Mary's mouth; a line that her sister had never seen there before, and her eyes were really cold and angry. Suddenly her expression changed; there was the sound of horses' feet in the avenue, Mary

looked out, and saw Augustine riding towards the house, accompanied by his two boys and Mrs. Gregory. He looked up and waved his hand to his wife, and Molly answered the greeting. When she drew her head in again her face was all radiant and tender with happiness.

"Look at him, Elizabeth," she whispered; "is he not the goodliest, finest gentleman the Lord ever made? What wonder that poor creature envies me my good fortune! I can forgive her now that I have seen him again! He had been away nigh on three hours, so what wonder that I was feeling ungenerous and bad!"

Mr. Ned Carter did ride over from Frotchett Manor that night, and brought a young friend with him, both making light of the twenty-mile ride, since they knew that they would not be allowed to depart before the next day. And Sally looked dazzlingly pretty, and only indulged in one grimace made behind Aunt Kitson's back, and unnoted by all but Molly, who tried to appear severe, but broke down and laughed, with a warm feeling of approbation for her staunch though naughty supporter. The plantation fiddler, a bent but bright-eyed old negro was called in to play while the young people danced, and his wild music set the young blood dancing faster than the light feet. Augustine, at a hint from Molly, led out the cantankerous Mrs. Kitson for a country dance, and concord reigned for that night, while William dispensed punch, and Rhine wine, and various other drinks, after the fashion of the day, which certainly did not include any too morose sobriety among the social virtues. When midnight struck, Elizabeth stopped the gaieties and sent her pretty lambs off to bed. Augustine left the others, and came with Molly to her room.

"I cannot stay, sweetheart," he said, "those lads will be for a pipe and a quiet glass now till cockcrow—and Heaven send Chanticleer awake early, for I am almost tired; but I had to come and kiss thee first! There's no woman worth looking at, nor no girl either, when my sweet Molly is there! Now get some beauty sleep, and see if thou canst dream of thy loving husband!"

A kiss on forehead and cheek, and a very tender one on silent, sweet lips, and he went down to "the lads," while she crept to bed, all her troubles forgotten.

They seemed much lighter after a few days of Elizabeth's presence. Mrs. Bonurn went into all the details of administration with her, from the fresh distribution of work among the slaves and the bettering of their quarters, to the apparently subordinate question of how many pairs of clean hose the two boys might put

on in a week, this last detail having been one which Aunt Kitson had chosen to regard from the most Spartan point of view, apparently because neither she nor any of the servants cared about knitting up yarn into stockings. Many things were done for the comfort of the little lads; they vastly approved of being sent to their schoolmaster, the Reverend Hosea Williams, on their ponies, instead of having to trudge the long distance on foot. But the "new mamma" found them strangely backward in their reading and summing, and strongly suspected that there had been many days in the past when they had never reached Dr. Williams's house at all, preferring to play at a safe distance from that or their own till school hours were over.

"Don't do too much, child," said Elizabeth, as she made her farewell. "And when you come over to see me next month, tell Augustine to bring you in the coach. I'm thinking you'd better stop your riding, Molly; all that scampering round on skittish nags isn't the best thing for a young wife."

As the summer heats increased, Mary's cheeks grew less rosy, and she suffered at times from lassitude, and would go and rest for a while in her great, cool room, and sit with her head on her hand looking out over the lovely landscape with a grave little smile, thinking her own wise thoughts of all that lay before her. Then there would come a call from below, and she would return to her guests (of whom the house seemed always full in the long summer days), to her husband, and the boys and the servants, and the housekeeping, moving now with more sober steps and taking no part in the dancing and frolickings save to smile at the frolics, and sometimes make music for the dancers. But they would never have her absent, and the party in the big parlour or the summer house was not reckoned complete unless the hostess occupied her honoured place, and Mary was very happy; happy in the kind present, happy in the sweet, mysterious future, happy most of all in her husband's perfect trust and love.

The one disturbing element was removed for two or three months. Mrs. Kitson went to pay a long visit to other relatives, and when Mary thought of her at all it was with the unspoken hope that she would find their establishment so much to her liking that she would remain there indefinitely.

But this was not to be. Returning one day in early autumn from Sally's wedding, a most gay and successful affair, Mary and Augustine heard Aunt Kitson's well-known voice in the hall as they ascended the steps. Augustine, for all his easy good humour, swore a round oath as he recognized her tones, and it fell to

Mary to drown it in some welcome of greeting. Aunt Kitson had not grown mellow in absence; either the other relations had sympathized too much or too little with her fancied wrongs, and she was evidently bent on asserting herself.

"Upon my word, Mrs. Washington," she began, "'tis a good thing I came back when I did! Here's you and my nephew gadding round the country, and those poor lambs of boys turned out of their mother's house because you won't stay here to take care of them!"

"Aunt Kitson," said Mary, flushing scarlet, "you know not of what you are talking! The boys were sent to stay with Doctor Williams that their lessons might not be interrupted during our absence. A week of wedding frolic was not like to forward either their studies or their health!"

"And how about yours, madam?" inquired Aunt Kitson, angrily. "By the look of you, I should say you were better at home than dancing jigs at Sandy Point! I don't know what young women are coming to, that I don't! And Madam Williams has just sent over to say Lawrence has got the measles, and she wants him taken away to-night, for fear her own babes should catch it! Oh, I knew what it would be if I left you!"

Now, to tell the truth, Augustine had stayed outside on the porch to recover his temper, so that Mary had borne the brunt of this attack alone; but as Aunt Kitson uttered the last words he stepped to his wife's side.

"It seems to me, aunt," he said, "that these bad tidings are more connected with your return than with your departure. Will you be pleased to keep any more that you have for my ears, and spare my wife, who, as you perceive, is fatigued as well as somewhat taken aback by so many surprises." Molly had turned to him with profound distress in her face at the news of the boy's illness, and Augustine now addressed her. "Have no fear, Molly," he said, drawing her arm within his, and preparing to lead her upstairs, "the distemper is one all children must pass through, and Lawrence will be well done with it!" I will go over now, and bring both boys back, and do you lie down and rest while I am away."

"You must take blankets to roll him up in, and, for Heaven's sake, see that he get no chill," said Mary. "Oh, I do think I had better go for the poor child myself!"

"You shall do nothing of the sort, Mrs. Washington," said Augustine, firmly. "Have I been a father these twelve years for nothing! Do you think I cannot bring the lad back over those

three miles as safely as you could do! Hoity toity, madam, you've either a very good opinion of yourself, or a very poor one of me!"

They had ascended the stairs by this time, having left Aunt Kitson in the hall, where she was rating William about some trifle. She had meant to be the centre of importance with her bit of bad news, and was mightily put out to find herself ignored. Mary looked down over the banisters, whence she could see the top of Aunt Kitson's cap shaking excitedly.

"Oh, dear," sighed Mary to her husband, "what a very great pity it is that she has had the disease!"

"Molly!" laughed Augustine, "I never heard you say such a hard word before!"

"My dear," returned his wife, "'twould be for the good of her soul and ours if we could roll her up in blankets and keep her on gruel for a few days! I'd far rather 'twere she than poor little Lawrence!"

"You have had it, have you not, Molly?" asked Augustine, with sudden anxiety.

"Oh yes, long ago," she replied, "so I'll stay with Lawrence, and you'll have the care of Aunt Kitson. Poor Augustine!"

So, with one thing and another, it was not till Christmas was at hand that daily life resumed its usual course; at Christmas-time the house was again full, two or three beds in every room, and young men camping wherever they could find a shake-down. The *Fortuna* had just returned from another voyage to Europe, and Mary insisted upon making Captain Jones one of her Christmas party. He had brought many messages and gifts from Fidelia and Joseph, and Mary looked upon him as a kind of link with many things she loved on the other side of the world.

The old sailor had seldom found himself in such very fine company, and was at first rather shy and silent. But sweet Kitty Bonurn took him under her wing, and helped Mary to put him at his ease. Then the young people found that he had an inexhaustible wealth of stories to tell, and night after night, with only the light of the roaring wood fire to show the pretty picture, they would gather round him, boys and girls sitting on the floor or on the arms of his chair, and listen while he told them marvellous yarns of adventures on the high seas, of pirates and buccaneers, of icebergs and ghostly ships, of a bewitched cargo which he had taken on board as opium and silk at Madras. "No mistake, my dears, for I verified each bale myself," and had landed to find it turned into rotten hay. Why? Well, Captain Jones couldn't

exactly say, but he'd gone to sea on a Friday, which was a heathen kind of thing for a Christian man to do, more by token the moon was in her last quarter and upsidedown than she had any business to be; and then a Finn, who was one of the hands, had died suddenlike for no reason as anybody could make out (except that he could never have got so far south by honest means, and that he was a black pagan) and they buried him; and nobody being particular anxious to say honest prayers over him he went without, and came bobbing up, weights and all, three days afterwards, grinning something awful, and scaring the hands out of their wits in the dog watch. And anyhow, when we made London town, six months later, we had that darned cargo of damaged hay, and it took me three years' rough sailing to make it good. But I never put to sea on a Friday since, nor I won't have a hand as can't do his swearing, I mean, say his prayers, in good English!"

Then the boys' eyes would dance with excitement, and the girls would hold each others' hands very tight and look over their shoulders into the dark corners where the firelight did not reach; and, as soon as breath could be found for it, there came an unanimous appeal for more stories, and Captain Jones always had another more weird and exciting than the last!

On Christmas Eve the fun was going fast and furiously, a wild game of hide and seek all over the house having been started by Sally Carter, who, as the last bride, had, by a sort of common consent, been constituted queen of the revels. She was just seventeen, her new lord and master not yet twenty, and Sally pretended that any breaches of decorum in the wild romp were legalized by her presence, as a married woman forsooth. Mary grew tired with the noise and laughter, with the scampering of feet up and down stairs, and the constant cannonade of slamming doors. Now some young beauty would shriek as she was caught in the arms of a dashing admirer; now some cavalier, splendid in red coat, lace ruffles, and diamond shoe-buckles, would distance his pursuers by a reckless leap across the dining-room table, or dart upstairs four steps at a time to plunge under the down cushions on somebody's bed, where he would lie, shaking with laughter, while the girls tip-toed in and searched the room, keeping ever an eye on the door in case quarry turned hunter and pounced out upon one of them from nook or cupboard. Ned Carter, in one of his races for safety, burst into Aunt Kitson's room like a tornado, to behold her in bed-gown and night-cap, preparing to climb into bed. What she hoped to gain by trying to sleep, it would have been difficult to imagine; but she was one of those misfortunate persons

who are born to protest; happiness around her always excited the desire to do so, and this was, in her judgment, the best way to show it. There had never been such unseemly exuberance of enjoyment at Wakefield in dear Jane's time, she told herself; it had all come with that ambitious, flighty, unprincipled Mary Ball. Well, to bed with a sour good-night to all first, to mark her going, and a loud-spoken hope that nobody would burn the house down before morning.

When she heard the door burst open, and looked round, with one foot on the bed-step, to see Mr. Carter gazing at her in open-mouthed dismay, she gave a piercing shriek and plunged in among the feather mattresses; the curtain flew into the candle and was instantly set ablaze, and the bold intruder had to rush forward and tear it down, stamping out the fire from the fragments on the floor. Aunt Kitson was paralysed with rage and fear, and when the young scapegrace said in the gentlest of tones, "Pray permit me to tuck you up, madam!" she sat up and pointed a trembling finger to the door.

"Well," said he, "I think I'd better prevent any more accidents!" And forthwith he blew out the light and fled, to fall into the arms of lively Sally in the passage. Sally grasped the situation at once, for she had marked Aunt Kitson's withdrawal, and pretended to be in a terrible taking of jealousy at his pursuit of the lady. Ned was dragged before a jury, hastily called in the passage, and condemned to kneel before Mrs. Kitson's door and serenade her with a drinking song. At the sound of something like strong swearing within, accompanied by the hurtling of a slipper against the door, the girls ran away, and tumbled helter-skelter down the stairs, chased by Ned; and then, out of breath, they sat on the banisters, while he gave them his version of what had just happened, amid peals of laughter and clapping of hands.

It was all delightfully innocent and absurd, but it was rough play, and Mary felt that Aunt Kitson had a right to be very angry this time. She crept to the lady's door and offered apologies—through the keyhole, for Mrs. Kitson would not open, and appeared to be deaf to Mary's pleadings that she would pardon the young people whose spirits had so carried them beyond the bounds of due respect. Mary herself was tired by this time and she longed for a few minutes of quiet, and since that was not to be had in the house, she picked up a cloak in the hall and slipped out into the porch, which ran all along the garden side of the house.

All here was tranquillity, so intense that the sounds which

reached her from indoors seemed to come from very far away. The night was keen, almost frosty, and the sky was blazing with cold, white stars, darting out such rays against its velvety darkness that they seemed to be breathing, palpitating with living light. The world was still with the cold hush of winter, the woods on either hand stretched away in sombre shadow, unstirred by wind or bird. The river had turned for the ebb, and was flowing down to the sea with steady force, and there, at the little wharf where Mary had landed over six months ago with Augustine, one or two boats were pulling at their chains and knocking against the piles with dull, recurring thuds.

Careless of satin shoon and costly skirt, Mary stepped down from the porch, and began to descend the sloping path towards the river; the pure, cold air on her face was delight after the heated rooms, the silence balm after the noise and laughter. And the solemnity of the night brought to her mind the meaning of it, a meaning seldom thought of by the careless, pleasure-loving world of that day. Christmas night, the night for which seers and prophets had strained dim eyes through the mists of centuries untold, the night through which holy men and women had watched on their knees, thanking God for its salvation—its meaning came back to Mary now as she stood under the midnight sky alone. Soon she also would be mother, soon she would clasp to her heart the treasure that had been carried beneath it, soon she would say to the spotless Mother, "I too, Holy One, am thy sister here on earth, my child is brother to thy glorious Babe!"

And as these thoughts were in her mind, she raised her head and clasped her hands, and prayed such prayer as none but pure and loving women use when their heart's fruition knocks at the doors of life, and they bid it tarry till God's time be come.

CHAPTER VI

THE short, southern winter was almost over, and the birds were twittering in trees leafless still, but all overglowing with the promise of the spring. The house was almost silent now, except when the two boys returned from school in the evening. Augustine watched his wife with tender care, feeling, in spite of her splendid youth and strength, more fear than he would own at the trial which lay before her.

She was very calm in those days, more silent than of yore, and there was a steady light shining in her eyes—reflections, as it were, of beacons high and far away. Every one blessed her as she passed—the servants who had learnt to love her gentle rule, the friends who came but stayed not long, for fear of tiring her. Only one person was not touched by the sweet woman waiting so patiently for her hour of pain and glory. Mrs. Kitson, from being a mere daily annoyance, had become a trial that bordered on the unendurable. She made sharp, scornful little speeches, which implied that Mary was giving way to indolence, was magnifying her own discomfort in order to make herself of importance. And Mrs. Kitson found other ways of annoying the young wife—ways which tended to undermine her influence with her stepchildren. When the old lady saw that these attempts were unavailing she took another course, and was so unkind to Lawrence and his brother that Mary was obliged to intervene and warn her that the boys must not be slapped and scolded merely to vent her own ill-humour. Mary would not report these disgraces to Augustine yet; she felt that so long as she was present the little lads would be fully protected, but she resolved to put him on his guard when she would not be able to watch over them.

But the moment for action was precipitated; and Mary, all unfit for battle, was thrust into the forefront of a decisive one. It was the twentieth of February; and, tempted by the beauty of the day, she was sitting in the garden, on a favourite bench sheltered

by evergreens where she and Augustine had spent many happy hours in the bygone summer. Augustine was at home to-day, going through volumes of accounts with the bailiff. Mrs. Kitson was sewing by the fire in the drawing-room; the boys were not expected back from school for another two hours.

Suddenly they appeared before her, with eager, happy faces.

"Doctor Williams sent us home, ma'am," cried Lawrence; "he said we had been very industrious, and might have a half holiday!"

"May I sit beside you?" asked Augustine; and, not waiting for the answer, he nestled to her side.

She smiled at Lawrence, and patted the bench at her right hand as an invitation to him to do the same. Lawrence, thirteen years old now, was still childish in many ways; he was not so strong as his junior, and had a gentler, clinging nature, which endeared him greatly to Mary's heart. She had to hold the balance very carefully between the lads, both adoringly jealous of her favour.

Lawrence sat down, clasped both hands round her arm, and, to her amazement, heaved a sigh.

"Why, what is the matter, Lawrie?" she said. "You looked so happy; but now!"

"I shan't be long!" he replied. "'Tis nearly over, mamma; and I shall be so exceedingly sorry."

"My dear child, what do you mean?" Mary asked, looking into his troubled face. "What is nearly over?"

"You being fond of us," said Lawrence, gloomily. "Aunt Kitson says you are going to have a boy of your own, and that you will never love us any more." His lip quivered, and he seemed to be on the verge of tears.

Mary turned pale. She was too shocked to speak.

Then Augustine took up the tale of woe. "Yes," he said, turning his solemn, blue eyes up to her face, "she says you will hate us, and make papa hate us, and that you will send us away from home to have it all for your own little boy. Oh, I do hate him!" and Augustine clenched his fist.

She looked from one to the other, and spoke hesitatingly. "Boys," she said, "you have never told an untruth in my hearing, so I must ask you to forgive me for ever seeming to doubt you; but—pray think very carefully before answering—is this true?"

"Of course it is true," said Lawrence, looking surprised. "She has often said it since Christmas—she said it again

yesterday, when you and papa went out of the room after dinner!"

There was silence for a moment, during which Mary was trying to find the right words to say to these children. Generous even in her distress, she felt that things must be made clear for them before her own wrongs were righted. She must assure them of her own kindness and love without too violently hurting their opinion of an older person who had often been placed in authority over them. It was hard, but at last she thought she had found the right words to say. She took a hand of each, and made the boys stand up before her; their faces were on a level with hers, and as she looked into their eyes they felt that something unusually solemn was happening.

"My dear little boys," she said, clasping tight the small, hot hands, "I wish you always to remember what I am about to say to you, because, if you forget it, we shall all be very unhappy. I loved you before I had ever seen you, because your papa loved you. I loved you afterwards because you are good, truthful, kind-hearted children; and though your father could not love you better than he did before, he has been very much pleased by seeing how affectionate and obedient you are to me. Nothing, except bad conduct on your part, could make either of us love you less, and of that we have no fear. If you have a new little brother we shall look to you both to be very kind to him and to set him a good example. You will never have to leave your home unless we come with you. Do you quite understand?"

"Oh, dear mamma, I am so glad," cried Lawrence, who was by far the more emotional of the two; and he threw his arms round her neck and hugged her joyfully.

Augustine still looked troubled and doubtful. "But why did Aunt Kitson——," he began.

Mary interrupted him quickly. "Aunt Kitson made a mistake, dear," she said, "and I am going to explain it to her. She, too, will understand; and then she will tell you that she did not mean to say anything unkind, or to make you unhappy. It was all a mistake, and you must both put it out of your minds, and never think of it again. Now, promise me to wait here until I send for you."

Mary went straight to her husband's office, and asked him to dismiss the overseer for a few minutes, as there was a matter upon which she must speak to him at once.

Blanchard—a quiet, capable man, who had come to Augustine as an indented servant, and had chosen to remain with a good master—gathered up his papers and went out.

"What is it, Molly?" Augustine asked, somewhat anxiously, for Mary's face was unusually stern. "I hope nothing very serious has occurred! Sit down and tell me all about it!"

"It is something serious, my dear," she replied; "otherwise I would not have disturbed you. I have come to ask you to do two things—to make Aunt Kitson retract some abominable untruths which she has been telling the boys about us both, and then to send her away. I will have her here no longer."

Augustine looked dismayed. He had an intolerant hatred of scenes and disturbances.

"When you learn what has happened you will entirely agree with me," said Mary, as steadily as she could. Then she told him with much deliberation all that the children had said.

"Augustine," concluded Mary very seriously, "the children have never told me an untruth. Their hearts were full of sorrow and of hatred for the little one who is coming. My child shall not be born in a house of strife and jealousy and malice. I must risk your displeasure, which is bitter to me, but a less misfortune than the other. I would spare you the scene; but she will take no commands from me."

"Spare *me*?" cried Augustine, springing to his feet, and standing up—tall, angry, and scornful, before her. "Molly, what are you talking about? Am I a man to send his wife, close upon her lying-in, to do his scolding for him? D—n it all, that would be a cur's trick!"

Molly had counted upon his ready sympathy, forgetting that the finer fellow a man may be the more he will resent being drawn into domestic quarrels. She stood silent, wondering if Aunt Kitson had managed to deprive her of her husband's support at the moment when she most needed it. That would indeed be a terrible misfortune. Her lip trembled, and she dared not speak, for fear of shedding weak tears.

Augustine looked at her and saw her trouble—remembered all that she had given him in the past, all that lay before her now, and his great love banished all minor feelings.

"My dearest," he said, drawing her to him—"my sweet wife—did I grieve you and frighten you? Oh, forgive me! Men are such blundering creatures. You know how truly I love you. Doubtless you are right in this. I will go and speak to Aunt Kitson at once. You go and fetch the children." And he went into the house to find Mrs. Kitson, while Molly returned to the bench in the garden.

The boys saw her from a distance, and ran to meet her. "Your father wishes you in the house; but you shall run off very soon." And she led them towards the porch, going but slowly, for her heart was beating painfully at the thought of the interview which appeared to her indispensable for the public good. Also, she must give Augustine time to explain himself.

That had not taken him long. When Mary entered the parlour with a boy on either side of her, Augustine was standing beside Mrs. Kitson on the hearth. The unhappy old lady looked horribly frightened.

"Now, ma'am," said Augustine, "will you kindly speak to the boys?"

There was no help for it. With hesitating, unwilling speech, Mrs. Kitson managed to make her retraction, saying that she had certainly made an unfortunate mistake which she now took occasion to correct. She was quite convinced that papa and mamma would never change in their feelings towards their sons—and she hoped that if they ever had a new brother they would love him and be kind to him. Molly pitied Aunt Kitson in that moment, and got the boys out of the room before the poor, perverse woman burst into tears. But pity could not blind her so far as to make her court danger again. She waited till Mrs. Kitson was sufficiently composed to look for her pocket-handkerchief, protesting angrily the while at the humiliation that had been put upon her.

"There was no humiliation, aunt," said Augustine; "on the contrary, you will be glad to think that the boys' last interview with you will leave a kind and comforting impression on their minds."

Mrs. Kitson looked up sharply. "Their last interview?" she repeated. "So they are to be sent away again? Ah, I was right, after all, nephew!" And she glanced witheringly at Mary.

"No, ma'am," said Augustine, coming nearer to her and speaking courteously, in spite of his indignation. "The children are not to be sent away. You, I think, would benefit just now by a change of air: and I would suggest that you should make a visit to your sister, who doubtless will be very glad to see you."

"You turn me out?" cried Mrs. Kitson, furiously, "you actually turn me out of my poor niece's house? Oh, Madam Washington, this is your doing, I perceive! You venomous, deceitful creature, you have hoodwinked your husband—you have insulted me—you are plotting to rob my poor Jane's boys of

their heritage! 'Tis enough to make their mother turn in her grave!"

Augustine laid a heavy hand on her shoulder. "Silence, woman!" he thundered; "if you have not the decency to respect me you shall respect my wife. Mary, leave the room. It is not fitting that you should stay here another moment!"

But Mary, big with a nation's weal, came and stood before Mrs. Kitson. She was white and sick as she said her say.

"Madam, I came here truly meaning to offer you affection and respect. Such gifts demand a like return. You have done your best to bring great sorrow to us all. You have compelled me to ask that my home may be freed from hatred and malice. God have mercy upon you, for He knows what hath brought you to this; but I will not have an evil heart in my house. This place is for those who love one another and fear the Lord." Then she turned and left the room, and did not see Mrs. Kitson again. And a great peace seemed to settle upon the house.

At midnight Elizabeth Bonurn arrived, having ridden back with Augustine's messenger, who had departed with an entreaty that she would come to Wakefield as soon as she could. Mary had refused to have her sister called from her busy household a day before she was needed, and did not know that, at a whispered word from Mammy to the master, a groom had ridden away to Sandy Point early in the afternoon.

"How is she?" asked Mrs. Bonurn, looking eagerly at her brother-in-law's anxious face. "I was so afraid I should not arrive in time!"

"She is not in danger, Mammy tells me," Augustine replied; "but—Elizabeth, you do not know what it is to have to see her suffer. My poor Molly!" and his voice broke, and he turned away his face.

Elizabeth laid her hand on his arm with all the sympathy of silent understanding, and in a moment he went on—

"She falls asleep with exhaustion, poor child, and then it wakes her. I cannot bear it, Elizabeth. You who are so wise, can you not do something? Is there no way to shorten all this cursed unnecessary anguish. For God's sake, do something!"

"I can do little but cheer and encourage her," said Elizabeth; "but, dear Augustine, I, who have been through it, can say that, terrible as it is, it is not a curse, not unnecessary. It does in some mysterious fashion redeem the mother-love from the last stain of

selfishness. What sacrifice is hard for our children, after this one? May I go to her?"

"Come," he said, moving towards the stairway, "it will comfort her greatly to have you with her."

They paused to listen outside the closed door, fearing to deprive her of the few moments of sleep that she might snatch. But a little murmur came to their ears. Mammy was talking in her sweet, low voice.

"Dere, poor lamb, let me hold you, so—terrible bad, ain't it?—Mammy knows—Mammy knows! Put your head on my shoulder, and t'ink of de lovely baby-boy fighting to get into your arms! Why, you'll just be laughin' soon!"

Elizabeth opened the door, and went in. Mammy was sitting on the bed, holding Mary in her strong, kind arms. The beautiful golden hair was all shed on her shoulder, and her black face wore an expression of divine love and pity. Mary lay against the old nurse like a child, and the candle light showed her white brow glistening with the dews of agony.

Augustine closed the door, and turned away. The women were stronger than he just now. Better the lonely watch downstairs than that sight. But Elizabeth ran towards her sister with open arms. Molly's blue eyes lighted up, and the ghost of a smile came to her lips.

"Is that you, dear sister?" she said. "I am so glad you have come—to help me——"

"I have come—to see you promoted on the field of honour, my dear!" said Elizabeth.

The turn of the year and the risen sun, singing of birds, and rushing of clean winds in the broad, brave beauty of day. Mary put out a weak hand to touch the tiny head that lay on Elizabeth's arm.

"Joy—in the morning," she murmured. "My morning child, I am glad you were not born in the night."

She woke from sleep in the afternoon to find herself, as she thought, alone, with her first-born lying beside her on the white bed. Everywhere was peace and sweetness. She turned a little, and drew him into her arms, and lay, looking down into the small face that she had dreamed of for so many months. The blue eyes, new to the light, were half closed. Silent and fair, the infant lay on her arm, and Mary spoke to her child.

"My little one," she said, "I no longer carry thee in this poor

body, but thou hast left in it a heart which is devoutly thine. Sweet and terrible hast thou been to me—thy mother. Thou knowest of me, as I of thee, things which no other will ever learn. Little son, I have essayed, in carrying thee, to wrap thee in love and purity; and I give that heart of thine to goodness, love, and purity this day. Let it be God's throne, those tiny hands His servants, those tender feet His messengers!" She paused, bent her head, and kissed the broad, unconscious brow. Then she lay back, still and white, content to feel him close, soothed by the happy sounds of breeze and song that came up from the garden. Then again she spoke. "Oh, my kind God, is it possible that this tiny innocence doth bear some primal stain? If, indeed, Thine awful purity perceive such thing in him, wash, cleanse, efface it, in this hour! Hath not my night of anguish some price in Thine eyes? In love and worship was this child conceived, in agony with submission brought forth. Let my sufferings here unite with Thine—to seal him Thine for ever!"

Then, weary, yet blessed, she fell asleep.

In the first days of her motherhood Mary looked forward to the time when her little boy should be running by her side and calling her by name, as something indefinitely distant; when it came, a little sister had taken his place in her arms, and the heart that had seemed incapable of holding all its love for him had embraced a new love without diminishing the heritage of the first. Little Elizabeth was scarcely the peaceable, placid babe that George had been. He had his regal tempers indeed, and sufficiently disturbing they were when they declared themselves; but they were few and far between. The little master seemed disinclined to assert himself unless the matter of his grievance were one of serious import to his comfort; then he compelled attention in no hesitating manner, and took his delinquent attendants back into grace the moment the trouble was over. Little Betty, as she very soon came to be called, was quick, observant, and, to tell the truth, very capricious, so that she was occasionally what her brother had never been, something of a trial to her wise and gentle mother.

When Betty was about six months old, Mary had to comfort Augustine for the loss of his eldest daughter, who died in the cold days of January, 1734. She had been but little at home since her father's second marriage, having been constantly visiting her own mother's relatives, as well as sweet Madam Marye in Fredericksburg. Her death scarcely made an empty place in the Wakefield

household, but Augustine loved all his children too truly not to be much saddened by the loss of his little Jane in the flower of her baby youth. Two of her brothers had already passed untimely away, and Augustine, in his natural depression at this period, felt that death was watching his family with all too covetous eyes. He was relieved, however, by receiving good news from Lawrence and Augustine, who had been sent to England to complete their education; and the birth of another son in the November of this year brought him renewed hope and joy. The little man was christened Samuel, and thrived finely through the chilly season which he had selected for his entry into the world. His mother almost wished that he would have postponed his arrival for a little longer, when his brother and sister should have required less of her constant care; but she smiled on him as she had on them, realizing that her children were teaching her many things, among which the chief and best was the necessity for a more perfect control of her own moods and feelings. One day when George had given way to one of his injurious rages, and little Betty had been as fractious and trying as an unreasoning baby can be, Mary, tired out and momentarily discouraged, sat down between the two little cribs where the children were sleeping their woes away, to ask herself whence all these nursery tragedies had arisen.

The house at that time was full of guests, uninvited, but always made welcome in the land of unlimited hospitality. Augustine's occupations suffered little from their presence, as it was an understood thing that he should visit the farms, interview the overseers, and go through his accounts, accompanied by any of his men visitors who cared for such things, but in no case deterred from attending to them if his friends preferred other occupations. In the case of the hostess it was different. All this entertaining entailed constant supervision of servants in kitchen and store-room: linen-presses had to be kept well filled, and were often emptied down to the last shelf in the requirements of some unexpected inroad; provisions disappeared with lightning rapidity, and the cellars had to be constantly restocked with costly wines. On this particular day Mary was conscious of having been hurried from one thing to another with little volition of her own. She had been called from her room almost before she was dressed, to see the poor cook, an artist upon whom the mistress looked as a kind of black right hand. Delia had been "took sick," as Mammy expressed it, and when Mary reached the great, straggling kitchen-quarters which spread away at the back of the house, she found

Delia very ill indeed, bemoaning her misfortunes to a sympathetic horde of underlings, no one of whom was capable of taking her place. Mrs. Washington had to be doctor, nurse, and dictator all in one, the directing brain of the great establishment. It was as impossible to get medical aid in a hurry as it was to fill the place of the suffering artist. The mistress must do everything at once. Delia was placed in her bed, surrounded with hot bricks and blankets, and dosed with a huge tumblerful of hot, spiced shrub; then she was left to the care of her three daughters, well-grown girls of the beautiful deep chestnut colour which betokened the highest class of negro. The moment "Miss" Washington's back was turned they relieved Delia of the bricks, which she declared were scorching her, and brought her a nice drink of ice-cold water from the spring; so it was not likely that she would be much better yet awhile. But her mistress knew nothing of that, since she had to get the breakfast cooked for some fifteen persons with eighteenth-century appetites and digestions. Breakfast was half an hour late, and Augustine and Ned Carter had been on horseback since six, and were impatiently hungry, as they had a right to be. It was over at last, and as Mary rose from the table with a sigh of relief and a whisper to Mrs. Gregory, to "please look after the ladies till noonchin" (the hearty snack which preceded dinner by a couple of hours), the mother's ears were greeted by a scuffle of feet and a mighty roar from the nursery. Hastening thither, she beheld Master George, fully dressed in clean frock, laced pinafore, and new shoes, being lifted out of a cedar tub full of articles which Mammy had put to soak, and in which he had decided to go to sea with a paper boat. He was now violently resenting the interference. Mammy held him up, a dripping little rebel, for his mother's inspection, and then burst into tears of protest when Mrs. Washington sternly ordered him back to bed. Betty, meanwhile, had taken advantage of the situation to creep towards a heavy towel horse and pull it down upon her head, and added her shrieks to the general tumult. By this time Mary was herself so ruffled as to give way to her own temper, sharply telling the faithful Mammy that unless she could keep the children in better order some one must be found who could. A mournful peace being restored in the nursery, Mary started to take another look at Delia, and was met in the passage by Ned Carter, whose arrival the day before, without his wife, had somewhat puzzled the family at Wakefield.

"Pray, dear Molly," he said, "let me have a word with you! I am in monstrous trouble, and Augustine won't listen to me!

He says Sally and I are a couple of naughty children and ought to make it up at once or be well whipped! How can a man make it up with his wife if she throws her slipper at him when he reasons with her?"

"Have you and Sally had another quarrel?" asked Mary. "Oh, Ned, 'tis too bad. You both promised last time there should be no more! You set a shocking example to Eliza Lee and Charlie Mason. Betrothed couples should not see the married ones for ever bickering!"

For, to tell the truth, the young Mr. and Mrs. Carter managed to lead an existence more lively than harmonious.

"'Tis really Sally's fault this time," pleaded Ned, earnestly, "she is the most unreasonable creature that ever plagued a loving husband! What does she do yesterday but order out my English mare when my back is turned—Snowdrop's a handful between boots, and has never carried a petticoat yet—and gets her saddled and herself on somehow, and then there was the devil to pay, the grooms tell me! Sally wouldn't be beaten, and Snowdrop meant to win, and the end of it was they came down together and the mare cut her knees—and naturally I was very much annoyed!"

"My dear boy," said Molly, good-naturedly, forgetting her own troubles for the moment, "buy Sally a fine horse for herself, and teach her how to handle it, and pray Heaven to send her a child to occupy her! I cannot think of any better advice at this moment, except that I do wish you would both be good! People are beginning to talk too much about your fallings out."

"Oh, Lord, there she is!" cried Ned, distractedly, as some one came at a pounding gallop along the avenue. "I knew she would follow me. Do please, Molly, talk some sense into her naughty head!"

They both hastened to the front door, and reached it in time to see Sally in scarlet skirt and cheeks to match, come dashing up the avenue like an avenging sprite. She appeared to have ridden the twenty miles from Fratchett at the same wild pace, for her horse was white with lather, and painfully blown.

In a moment she was in Molly's arms, protesting that Ned was the cruellest of husbands, and that she had left his house for ever; while Ned, taking scant notice of her, slipped the bridle over his arm, and trotted the exhausted steed away to the stables to be rubbed down before he should take a chill. When Ned returned, Molly had talked the rebellious little wife into a more reasonable frame of mind, and was administering a glass of cordial. Her efforts were rewarded by seeing Sally begin to cry, always a sign

that she had had enough of sensation for one day, and was beginning to think of allowing herself to be pacified.

"Here comes Ned," Mary whispered; "now, Sally dear, be your own sweet self directly! He does love you dearly, and Eliza Lee, who is staying here, says he is the handsomest young man she ever saw."

Eliza was Sally's rival in the belleship of the country-side, and Mary descended to the strategy of mentioning her name as a wholesome tonic. Then she left the two young people alone, sure that they would make peace inside a quarter of an hour.

When Augustine had seen his guests to bed, he came into her chamber and asked if she were too tired to talk a little. There was evidently a matter of some importance on his mind, and Mary roused herself to listen with all comprehension and sympathy. He unfolded to her his desire to leave Wakefield and adopt for the family home another estate, which he owned on the Potomac, and which was then known as "Washington." His reasons were good enough. With the increase of the family, Wakefield promised to be somewhat overcrowded soon; there was a better house at Washington, the situation was extremely fine; and Augustine was anxious to give his personal attention to the development of the land, which had been a little neglected of late years, owing to its distance from the centre of administration at Wakefield. The Washington Manor estate was destined for Lawrence, and his father was minded to increase its value to the best of his ability during the next few years.

"You will be, perhaps, further removed from our present circle of friends, wife," he said, when he had told her all that was in his mind. "I do trust you will not miss them too much, nor suffer any loneliness in consequence." And he pressed her hand lovingly.

Mary gave one sigh of regret at leaving the home to which she had come as a bride, and where her children had been born. Then she saw in the decision the very solution she had been seeking. With change of habitation it would be easy to make other changes which she greatly desired. She looked up into her husband's face with a happy smile.

CHAPTER VII

BUT one disturbing incident remained connected in Mary's mind with the sojourn at Washington Manor, destined to be cut short in somewhat startling fashion. The adventure occurred early in the summer of 1737, when George was a fine venturesome little lad of five, and John, the fourth occupant of the old cradle in the nursery, was already outgrowing that harbourage, and kept the faithful Mammy busy enough in rescuing him from the mischief into which his new-found toddling feet so constantly allured him.

Mary was frankly glad to have a pause from the most arduous of her maternal duties, and went singing about the house and garden, seeing to the fair ordering of all that they contained, and in no wise hampered by George and Betty, who seemed to have no greater amusement in life than that found in following mamma about and persuading themselves that they were helping her in her tasks.

Augustine came in from a long ride one day just as the nursery doors had been closed for the night, and four pairs of bright eyes had followed their example. In the late twilight he loved to sit on the porch and talk of many things with the busy housewife, whose duties were over for the day, and who found in the hour of peaceful converse with the man she loved the reward of all fatigue and labour.

"Molly," he said, looking round suddenly into her face, "do you remember that piece of land near Penebec, which Joseph bought for some friend of his in England?"

"No," said Mary, "I do not call the matter to mind." And she raised her blue eyes and looked at him questioningly.

"It was not long after you went to England, and you may not have heard of it," he continued. "It is a fine property, some four or five thousand acres, I think, and was sold when the Lees divided their estate. I did not hear, or have forgotten, the name

of the purchaser, and I thought perhaps Joseph might perchance have mentioned it to you."

To Mary's mind the remembrance of Joseph's long conversations with that same purchaser suddenly came back, bringing a flood of other recollections. She was silent for a moment; the recollections were the least happy ones of her life, and even now, after years of throned security, disturbed her strangely. But with them came the question of whether she should be doing wisely in imparting her thoughts to Augustine. The subject which had brought such an outburst of angry jealousy from him on the terrace by the Thames, had never again been alluded to by either of them, and Mary, the revered wife and mother, felt an invincible repugnance to even pronouncing the name of the man who had once come near to disturbing her peace.

Augustine, busy in emptying his pockets of a mass of papers brought back from Wakefield to examine at his leisure, did not glance at her troubled face, and took no notice of her failure to answer his remark.

"I passed over a portion of the estate on my way home to-day," he said, "wishing to shorten the road that brought me back to you, my dearest, and I see that some manner of work is going forward, and that the old house, which was falling to pieces, is being rebuilt. I have often wondered that such fine land should be treated with such wasteful neglect. 'Twill take more than a year or two to bring it into order and fruitfulness again."

"Did you see no one there?" asked Mary. "It seems strange that we should have heard nothing. Gossip is a quick traveller in the country-side."

Augustine smiled in his contented way. "Mrs. Molly forgets," said he, "that when she asked for more exclusion with her fond, but dull husband, she voluntarily put herself and him at some distance from the most industrious of the gossip-mongers. The ferry is but a poor highway for nimble tongues!"

"Is the place near to this one?" asked his wife, secretly hoping that it might not be so.

"No," he replied. "'Tis, so far as *that* goes, several miles from here. But that is small distance in the country, and I trust we shall find these strangers good neighbours."

"I have small wish for more acquaintances," said Mary. "The kindest of husbands did choose but now to dub himself 'dull,' but he knows well that not only his wife, but each and all of his friends have long since acknowledged his company the most pleasant in the world. Having that, my dear, and the

companionship of the children, I am too well satisfied to wish for more."

When she found herself alone, however, Mary's mind reverted to the subject, with a sense of anxiety. Those who have set peace before them as the most desirable element of life, and who have obtained it by courage and patience, are jealously suspicious of complications which may disturb its serenity. Mary remembered the strange, reckless ways of her old admirer, and although in no sense connecting the news of to-day with any lingering desire on his part to see her again, felt nevertheless that she would not choose to have him for a neighbour. Such a man would not be an acquisition to the circle of closely connected friends and relations who owned all the great Tidewater and Midland properties around her. She comforted her soul, however, with the reflection that nothing was less likely than that Robin McClean should be proposing to become an industrious planter and country gentleman in America. She almost laughed aloud as she thought of the romantic, irresponsible Highlander playing such a part. Most likely he had sold the land, and the changes which Augustine had noticed were the work of its new proprietor, whoever he might be.

One day she took George out for a ride, he proudly bestriding his fat pony, and his lovely mother seated on her "pacing nag," a sweet-tempered brown cob, broken especially to do road-work for a lady. A negro groom followed them, but Mrs. Washington held the leading-rein of George's pony herself. She loved the saddle, and although nursery and household cares had greatly limited the time she could devote to riding, her beautiful, upright figure had lost none of its grace and suppleness, and she made a lovely picture in her scarlet habit and feathered hat, riding along through the green lanes with her proud little son at her side. The boy rather resented the leading-rein, but upon that point Mary was firm, and he had understood, from the first dawn of reason, that his mother's yea and nay were irrevocable. The mother and son were riding through a narrow lane, cut deep in the soil, and nearly overarched by acacias in bloom, while its sides were thick with broad masses of white elder-flower. Everywhere was the hum of bees drinking themselves mad with honey. A bluebird darted out just before the riders, catching the sun aslant on its azure plumage; two humming-birds were rifling the same trump of honeysuckle, their iridescent wings moving so rapidly that they looked like one flake of jewelled mist blown from powdered gems.

Suddenly there crashed through the hedge into the deep-cut

lane a magnificent black stallion, snorting with fury, mane flying, hoofs beating out for something to kill. As he landed, only a few yards in front of Mary and her boy, he sent the brown soil flying in their faces, and paused for an instant, as if scarce believing in his liberty, and staring at the other horses with wicked, bloodshot eyes. Either he liked them not, or their riders recalled the dangers of captivity, for the next moment he charged them, head down, like a bull. Mary's horse was the nearest to him, George's pony between her and the wall of earth. She had time to feel the cob stiffen under her with fright. The stallion had paused when close upon them, and was rearing and pawing the air with murderous hoofs. There was barely room for one to pass between him and the barrier.

"Hold tight, George," cried Mary, and, dropping the lead, gave the pony a cut that sent it flying forward past the black. For a moment she saw nothing but those awful hoofs in the air, then came a flash of George's golden hair and scarlet coat safe out on the road beyond. She dug the rowel into the cob's side and made for death or safety the way her son had gone. Her dress cleaned the lather from the stallion's flanks as she flew by, and she heard him pound the earth when he came down behind her. Far ahead the pony was galloping wildly, but the yellow curls were still streaming in the wind, the boy was still in the saddle. Fearful that the black would turn to follow, she raced on, and the cob's stride soon brought her near the pony, who was tearing along, yet beginning to slacken something of his pace, being too fat and well liking to keep up such a scamper for long. Now she had overtaken them, and saw, with pride which even the agitation of the moment could not drown, that her five-year-old still held the reins and was maintaining his balance without much difficulty. As she reached him he turned round to her, laughing.

"Thank you, mamma," he cried, short of breath, "that was grand!"

"Pull him in," Mary commanded, feeling suddenly faint, and reining in her own animal.

In a moment they were cantering more easily, side by side in the widening lane. A path debouched into it, and a man was standing there, looking this way and that. Glad to stop, Mary pulled up, and George followed her example.

"Is that your horse I met yonder, sir?" she said to the stranger, a tall, dark man in somewhat outlandish habit. "If so, you shall shoot or control him. He did nearly kill my son." Her strength

had come back to her in anger, and showed in her flashing eyes and quivering nostrils.

The man looked up, surprised by the imperious tone, and beheld the face of a most incensed and beautiful woman looking down upon him in judgment.

"Oh, not shot!" cried George, reaching out to lay his hand on her rein.

"Madam," said the stranger with deliberation, "I most deeply regret to learn that which you tell me. The horse broke away from the rein when they were attempting to saddle him. I do not inquire what jurisdiction you hold in this country, which is still new to me, but I pray you to be satisfied with my promise that the animal shall not break bounds again, and I trust you will not ask me to condemn him for a rascally groom's carelessness. I perceive that this young gentleman is on my side."

And he looked curiously at the boy. Mother and son were patently of Virginia's blood royal.

Mary heard his words clearly enough, and heard through them tones that her ears once knew well. The slow, clear speech had travelled far. She gazed in the stranger's face with a bewildering sense of familiarity. Where had she seen those dark eyes, those hard, defiant features before?

She bent over a little in her saddle, and said coldly, "I hold no jurisdiction beyond the claims of common safety, sir. See to that, and I am satisfied. But I wish to know your name."

The man drew himself up, with pride equal to hers. "Ian McClean, at your service, madam," he said, bowing stiffly. "May I know whom I have had the ill fortune to offend?"

"The boy whose life has been endangered by your criminal carelessness is the son of Mr. Augustine Washington," was Mary's reply; then she added, with something like haughtiness, "and I am that gentleman's wife."

With that she rode on. George at her side, her head in the air, and a pang at her heart. She knew voice and face now—this must be close kinsman to one Robin McClean of Duart, in the country across the sea. What but ill could come to her and hers from his name? So deeply immersed was she in considerings and apprehensions that she failed to notice George, who was quietly gathering up the straggling leading-rein, unbuckling its fastening, and tucking it into a pocket beneath the flap of his saddle.

Suddenly she remembered that she had not resumed her hold of the long strap. "Have you lost the leading-rein, George?" she asked, looking round at him.

"No, ma'am," he replied, straightening himself and meeting her eyes with his proud, steady look, "but I think we shall need it no more."

"Give it to me," said Mary, calmly.

His little face set itself in hard lines, strangely like those on his mother's countenance.

"I can do without it now," he said.

"That is for me to judge," was her reply, and she held out her hand. They were walking their horses, all needing a breathing spell after the recent excitements.

George's lip quivered, but he pulled the strap out from its hiding-place and handed it to his mother.

"My son," she said, "when a brave man hath earned promotion, it is his commander who shall confer it." And she flung the strap over the hedge.

He turned to her with a passion of joy in his face. "Thank you, ma'am," he said, and then added, stretching out his hand to touch her, "I shall trust you next time, mamma."

And then it was Mary who felt as if she had been promoted.

BOOK III

A VISION OF THE PAST

CHAPTER I

THAT summer, their latest born, little Mildred, died, and a subtle but definite change came to alter the moral climate, as it were, of Mary's life. The triumph of its summer was over. Still did the sun shine for her, still did peace enfold her, but the sunshine was tempered by the bracing chill of unexpected sorrow. The peace was won and held more by fortitude than by resignation. Her Christianity had to fight for its supremacy, and the struggle was not decided at once. Not her own loss, but the poignant memory of the little one's sharp suffering kept her wordless on her knees when she tried to pray, made her gravely rebellious when the other children laughed and played around her. It was all so useless, said the keen human judgment that had been accustomed to find only logic and harmony in God's dealings with man. The long months of silent preparation for life, the stormy entry therein, the short space of tears and smiles, of helpless dependence and unstained innocence, all these had been but the forerunners of unmerited agony, annihilation, and death. Of what good to the world of heaven or earth was that tiny grave beneath the pines? Did the God of Love need one more bright spirit near His Throne? Surely His power could have called into life there, without condemning woman and child to wasteful anguish, without leaving a sword in the woman's heart to stab her with pain for ever.

When some one pleaded with her, as indeed Elizabeth and others, well meaning, tried to do, that these 'chastisings' were necessary for her own perfection, she laughed with a bitter scorn at their halting theology. "Are we not all equal before God?"

she asked. "Did He deliberately torture my innocent child to teach me, grown woman, with a thousand faults and disloyalties to my score, some little bettering of my way? You call Him Love. Love need employ no such clumsy injustices to subdue our hearts."

And her would-be comforters were startled at her honesty, which was, after all, but a proof that her faith was greater than theirs, for through her deepest bitterness she would defend her God from the imputations of meanness and cruelty that these narrow-minded expounders of His methods unconsciously ascribed to Him. And, rejecting with honest scorn the subterfuges which humanity does use to reconcile itself to the necessity of suffering, she realized that her reasoning powers were confronted with a problem too great for them to solve. She must accept the wisdom of Divine ruling, or cease to believe in the Divinity. The existence of God was to her as incontrovertible a fact as her own. She knew it, that was all, even as she knew that her soul must live eternally. Face to face with this plain truth it became a logical necessity to accept another, namely, that the mystery of the suffering of the innocent is a secret of Supreme Wisdom, to which the key cannot be obtained in this life, but which will be satisfactorily explained in the next.

When one whom we have loved and served, according to our powers, through all our lives, turns a stern face towards us and inflicts unspeakable pain, our logic and our loyalty bid us endure in silence and pray for our leader's justification; but not at such moments can we bid our hearts overflow in expression of tender affection and protestations of thankfulness. Endurance has its outcome in hardening; and Mary, being strong enough to endure, grew less expansive, less lavish of her tenderness, more balanced and more grave. Her husband loved her more truly every day, but he recognized that she had passed through the fire and taken on a certain majesty of experience which would never be his. Her children felt, without naming it, a new-born awe, which resulted in more instant obedience, more expressed deference, and at the same time in higher confidence in the justice of her rulings. Her fresh gaiety was gone for ever, and in its place had come the grave earnestness of hard-won calm.

In the late autumn days old William passed away. To the last hour, almost, he crept out into the sun and sat on his bench, smiling at the children, smoking his pipe, and thinking over the humble happenings which had filled his life.

"How do you feel to-day, William?" said Mary, one mild November morning, sitting down beside her old servant, who no longer attempted to rise in her presence.

"I'm grand, Miss Mary," he said, his eyes lighting up at the sight of her. "Just a bit tired, that's all."

"You'll be better soon," she said. "These first days of the autumn are trying for you, but they say it will not be a hard season, and the spring comes early here."

"I dunnow, honey," he replied. "I don't kind of feel's if I want to stop for dat! Me and de sun's been pretty good friends, an' I guess I'll be going 'fore de days get much shorter."

"Oh, I hope not, William," said the mistress, "you mustn't leave us yet," and she looked at him with moistened eyes, remembering all his unquestioning love and service of a lifetime.

"I ain't just leavin', honey," he replied, looking out with dim, contented glance on the glorious autumn landscape, where the woods were still aflame with rosy fires that left the solemn evergreens untouched. "I've been thinking a lot, Miss Mary. Seems to me none o' your niggers has died since little Missy went?"

"No," said Mary, with the painful tightening at her heart that the mention of her lost baby always brought.

"Well," the old man continued, "den she ain't got nobody to wait on her, poor lamb, an' it's jes' 'bout time for me to go an' see 'bout it."

Mary turned and looked at him. The faithful soul could not conceive of a Paradise where there were not some of "his folks" to serve. He was still gazing out over the woods, and went on, as if talking to himself: "When my Billy's Dinah was so sick, I kind o' hoped she's be going 'long, so's Missy'd have one of her own folks round. But she done got well, lazy little coon, an' after all, I got more sense. Dem gals ain't much good nohow! Guess Missy'll be glad to see me, now she's growed 'nough to know where I come from. What you cryin' for, honey?"

For the bands round Mary's heart were loosed, and big tears were rolling down her cheeks.

That night William fell asleep, and doubtless woke up in "little Missy's" company. For childlike innocence of heart he was perhaps not unworthy of it.

In the early days of January, 1741, Mary had the great pleasure of receiving a visit from her brother Joseph, grown more portly, more solemn, but none the less serenely contented with himself and loftily critical of all else that the world contained.

The best room at Pine Grove was made ready for him, and when he arrived, Mary, remembering the rather massive luxury of English life, apologized for the simplicity of the best she had to offer.

"We are but farmers, after all," she said, "and I hope you remember enough of our ways not to find them inconveniently plain. Our climate is so kind that we are more out-of-doors than in!"

"It appears to me," said Joseph, looking round the roomy parlour with its tiled fireplace and roaring fire, its cabinet of treasured, well-thumbed books, its solid chairs and shining floor, "that you have had better fortune than we at one time did think you deserved, sister! You have much weakened the strength of a proverb which speaks of at last making shift with a crooked stick!"

"That ugly term would scarcely describe Augustine, would it?" she replied, with her grave smile. "Could you not have brought us Fidelia and the children, Joseph? George and Betty would dearly love to make friends with their cousins."

"Oh, Molly," he replied, "Fidelia would not leave England for fear that a bereaved country should sink into the sea with grief at the departure of such a notable woman! No, away from her home, Fidelia would find life a burden until she took over the managing of some other woman's domestic affairs. She still believes that no chicken will be hatched but an' she have taught the hen to sit—no tree bear fruit unless she have supervised the pruning and digging of it! Yet I would wish that she could dis-sever herself from the soil that is native to her. Had I my way, I would return to America even now!"

"You said that some years ago, I remember," interposed Augustine, laughing. "Why the devil don't you do it, man? There's room and roof to spare, and Mrs. Fidelia would rule a household of darkies like a very Pharaoh! 'Tis a wife's place to follow her husband, eh, Mary?"

"Ay," said Mary, "and her pleasure, too. But if the way be somewhat strait, and wife have taken the first step therein, master husband will find it hard to alter their positions. That which is not claimed by justice in its day is scarce worth obtaining when harshness must win it by force."

"You have grown mighty wise, Molly," said Joseph, winking his eyes at her over the top of his glass—for welcome was synonymous with strong drinks at that time. "Did my sister take the first step, Augustine? She hath come to have a truly

commanding presence! Are you king or consort in your home?"

"King, of course," Mary replied quickly, looking at her tall, handsome husband.

He laughed at Joseph's blunt question and Mary's answer. "You are both mistaken," he said, "and I like not your metaphors of strait ways and kings and queens, and shouldering for mastery therein! Shall I tell you what I seem to be when I have time to look for fine similes? I am too unlearned to seek for them often, but I do sometimes think that I am the great lumbering vessel that is laden with the family and its fortunes, and Mary is the crafty steersman at the helm that doth guide it into port!"

"Very well delivered," retorted Joseph, fresh from his experiences of the sea; "but, man, the steersman only moves as he is bid by captain or pilot. Whence hath Mary her orders?"

"From One wiser than we, I trust!" Mary replied gravely. "Come, George, and greet your uncle!" For at this juncture George appeared, in Sunday coat and with well-brushed hair, leading Betty by the hand. Behind them showed Mamma's dark face under her orange bandanna. The children were shy, but she pushed them forward to make their salutations to their uncle. George came and performed his bow with much dignity, staring at the new uncle with some wonder. Betty, an enchanting little mischief of six years old, whirled her pink skirts in a fine imitation of a curtsy, and then climbed uninvited on Mr. Ball's knee.

"I can hear it ticking," she whispered to him. "Please pull it out," and she tugged at the many seals that hung from a fob where Joseph's waist had once been discernible.

After supper, when the children had reluctantly been carried away to bed, and Mary had gone to see them safely consigned to their cots, the talk turned on the neighbours within hail of Pine Grove.

"We have some about whom I can make out nothing very definite," said Augustine; "they have been here some time now, and I have spoken them neighbourly when we met on the road, but never yet have I been in their house, nor they in mine."

"That seems something less than neighbourly," replied Joseph, looking surprised. "If I remember the old customs in these parts, they did enforce a kind of welcome to new-comers from those already established in the district."

"Ay," said Augustine, "and the custom still holds, and is a

kindly one, inasmuch as such is the treatment we would desire for ourselves in like circumstances. But these strangers appear to aspire to no friendship with the other landowners. They come and go—the family conditions seem to be constantly changing—in a morose, taciturn manner that would make a man think their business none of the honestest! They have bought their slaves in some distant market, and keep them close at home, so that the curiosity of the negroes finds no satisfaction in the gossiping intercourse that these dependents love. And then their earliest appearance here was marked by an incident which so greatly incensed my wife that she had no wish to see more of them.

And he told Joseph the story of Mary's ride with George while the family was living at Washington Manor. "That adventure," said Augustine, "seemed to have inspired Molly with something like a superstitious fear of meeting with any of that family. 'They can never bring good to us and our house,' she said, and I was no way eager to override her objections. Now, Joseph, I have told you all this because the name of the family is McClean, and you did effect the sale of the property to one of them."

"The devil I did!" said Joseph, looking much dismayed, "but that was before you came to live here, before you married Mary—before I knew—d——n it all, what a fool I have been!"

"Tell me what you 'knew' after the thing was done," said Augustine.

Poor Joseph flushed and moved in his chair. "The recollection is an unpleasant one," he said at last, "and the story contains more of Mary's counsel than I can deliver without her permission, I fear."

Augustine's eyes flashed. "Do you think Mary did not tell me her part therein?" he said, "or that I need come to her brother to hear of what hath happened in her fine, virtuous life? Mary would not let me marry her till she had related the facts, although any other girl one half as beautiful as she would not have thought twice of a passing tolerance for one of the many who have thrown themselves at her feet. What I ask you now, is to tell me the other half of that story, the one which is unknown to her, but which weighed so heavily with you that forbade her ever again to see the chief actor in it. If that man and his kin are to live within a stone's-throw of my house, 'tis but fitting that I should learn what manner of folk they be!"

"Augustine," began Joseph, leaning forward, his hands on his knees, and speaking very earnestly, "I thank God that I have few misdoings to look back upon in my life, having, but in one

instance, acted with circumspection and modesty. But that one instance hath left to me such a remembrance of sorrow, of appalling humiliation, that, but for Molly's present prosperity and happiness, I should have dreaded to meet my Judge. And this was the way of it. My valued friend and adviser, the late Mr. Alexander McClintock, writes to me a pressing letter of recommendation concerning a client of his, a man of ancient title and considerable wealth, presumably of good character, since I am desired to show him all friendship and assistance. The man comes, a fine gentleman, too fashionable for my first liking, perhaps, but seemingly open, gracious, intelligent, and with the pleasing manners of his class. We discourse of business during some days, during which the man falls hot in love with my sister, and formally makes his offer of marriage—marriage, mark you!

"What else?" cried Augustine, half rising from his chair in sudden anger.

"Wait," said Joseph, raising his hand. "Does a man who is not free to take a wife come and ask for a well-born maid, sheltered by the presence of her family? Had such an one come to you, seeking your consent to his marriage with your sister, would you have thought it necessary to say, 'sir, are you lawfully justified in your request?'"

"I should have told him to go to the devil," exclaimed Augustine.

"You would have done no such unreasonable thing," retorted Joseph. "Liking him well enough, accepting implicitly your friend's statements about him, you would have supported his suit. That I did, but at that time Molly, with some womanish divination of his real nature, would hear nothing of it, and sent him away. By-and-by my lord writes me that he is returning to the charge, and the maid, being informed, speaks gently of him, and appears to have in some measure overcome her repugnance. Here is a fine match for a girl who hath refused too many already. 'We'll settle our sister in life!' says I, 'and thus fulfil all brotherly duty towards her.' Then, just before he comes, a letter is put into my hands: McClintock writes, 'Drumardlee is a black villain, and you must never again receive such a malefactor into your house. He hath most foully insulted my sweet virtuous wife, who now lies at the point of death from a consuming fever brought on by these agitations. If I ever see him again I will shoot him, though I swing for it.' Having before apprised my lord that I meet him in London, I wait there to intercept him, and send a letter to Molly to say 'tis all over, or must be. Returning from despatching

this, I am hailed in the street by a gamester courtier, cousin of my lord, who hath already asked me about him more than once, and whom I have shaken off, for the plumed dandy is one of the sort an honest, prudent householder longs to strangle ere he begin to speak. 'What have you done with that scamp Drumardlee?' says he, 'Tucked him away with your doves at Cookham, where his next-of-kin can't borrow a crown from his bursting pockets? Have a care,' says he, swearing to profanity, 'he'll be playing some pretty games in your dovecote! Ask my lady how he's treated her and his son! She's a rough tongue has Jean, and I doubt she'll frighten you, my friend!'

"'Jean? My lady!'" says I, gasping. 'Is my lord Drumardlee married?' The street was spinning round me. 'Married? These ten years,' says he. Then he flings away in a fume, and leaves me choking! Back I pack to my house, and find a wild summons from my wife to say the villain's in Cookham a'ready."

"He was married?" interrupted Augustine, surprised out of his anger.

"That same," replied Joseph, "only the fiend knows the wickedness of the human heart! Molly never learnt the true name of Lord Drumardlee's crime. The good, sweet girl dismissed him on the receiving of my letter, and Fidelia and I would not wound her by telling her the rest. And is it this devil in human shape who hath dared to take up his abode in your very neighbourhood? If so, we must grant him the credit of courage!"

"If I meet him I will kill him at sight," said Augustine. "Molly believes 'tis some kinsman, brother or cousin, maybe, that she hath seen. The man himself hath not appeared. 'Twill be the worse for him if he do!"

"They'll be all of a feather," sighed Joseph. "Oh, my dear brother-in-law, had it not been for her pious obedience to my hasty letter, what misery might not have been hers—and ours!"

"I fear I am not a pious man," replied Augustine, "but this I do believe, that all the powers of evil would never be permitted to do my Mary the smallest harm. She walks too close in holy wisdom not to be most precious to the Almighty. But the man, the man—oh would I had him in my hands!"

"You will not tell her?" said Joseph, anxiously.

"What do you take me for?" was Augustine's quick answer.

When Mary returned to the room she noticed that both the men were somewhat silent, and they seemed moody for the rest of the evening.

The next day she was left a good deal alone, for Augustine,

picking out a sober-tempered pacer from the stables, took Joseph out with him for a long ride, soon after breakfast. Joseph, jogging along, somewhat short of breath, after a couple of hours' travelling, demurred at following his brother-in-law, who had jumped his horse over a low hedge into a field on the left. A clump of tall trees seemed to make a landmark just here.

"What's the matter with the road?" shouted Joseph, pulling up, and in no way anxious to take the fence.

"'Tis not good enough for us," returned Augustine, glancing round, "it runs through a d——d scoundrel's land for a couple of miles!"

"Whew," whistled Joseph, looking about him, "I'll go back and find the gate we passed but now." And he turned and trotted down the lane.

Augustine waited for him. The landmark trees grew on a knoll on the same side of the road on which he found himself, and a tiny stream ran past at the foot of the little eminence. Joseph had to ride back a quarter of a mile at least to reach the gate, and Augustine waited impatiently for him to join him before striking north to skirt the McClean property farther from the river.

As he sat there in the keen winter sunlight, reins loose to let his horse nibble at the short grass, he was aware of a figure emerging from among the tree-trunks and pausing at the top of the low hill. Looking more attentively, he perceived that a tall man, of sombre countenance and rather forbidding aspect, was staring down at him in no friendly fashion. Augustine stiffened and returned the stare, at the same time shortening rein. He now heard the sound of hoofs in the distance and muttered something not quite complimentary to his brother-in-law, whose queasy dislike of fences had caused this halt.

The man came striding down through dried fern and brushwood, and stepped across the stream towards Augustine, who merely turned his horse's head in his direction and waited in ominous silence for his approach.

When within a few yards the stranger stopped. He was evidently the same whom Mary had encountered before the burning of Washington Manor. His dark eyes were flashing angrily as he spoke, in a slow, vindictive manner, and with a marked Scotch accent, but with the unmistakable tone of a gentleman as well.

"I'll trouble you, sir, to repeat the speech you made but now to your companion!" he said.

"With pleasure, sir," was Augustine's reply, given in the easy tones of the born Virginian. "I said that the road at this point begins to run through land belonging to a d——d scoundrel—by which I did not wish to indicate yourself—and that it was not good enough for us."

The stranger retorted with icy self-control. "Will you further favour me by explaining to whom you did refer?" he inquired.

"To one McClean, or Drumardlee, for he seems to have as many names as disgraces," said Augustine. "If I am mistaken in believing that he has purchased this estate, I shall be indebted to you, sir, for setting me right!"

And he bowed in his saddle with the stiff politeness that is the dress of a quarrel between gentlemen.

"That I will," replied Ian McClean; "but before witnesses, as is fitting."

"My friend is here," said Augustine, his eyes blazing with angry joy. Joseph came pounding up at this moment and halted behind his brother-in-law. "Find yours, sir, and some weapons, since, as you perceive, I ride unarmed."

Ian McClean turned away without another word, recrossed the brook, and disappeared among the trees.

"What devil's game is this?" cried Joseph, looking round at his companion's face, where the hot blood had risen to cheek and brow.

"Bless you, good Joseph, for misliking that fence!" cried Augustine, his eyes shining like those of a boy. "Would I had the man himself! But this grim Scot means business, and is, pray Heaven, his next-of-kin! 'Twill be the first item we clear off the old account."

"Are you going to fight?" asked Joseph in dismay. "For God's sake, man, think of Molly and the children!"

"I am thinking of them," replied Augustine. "God would need to have pity on my soul if I struck not a blow at the house of him who would have attainted their mother's honour, and you are too true a brother to my Mary to think otherwise."

Joseph straightened himself in the saddle, and spoke with real dignity. "This should be my quarrel, by rights. I am no ruffler with sword and pistol, but the disaster was of my making, and my sister's enemies are mine. We'll change places when that gentleman returns, Augustine."

"No, we'll not," exclaimed Mr. Washington, "but here's my hand, Joseph!" and he reached out and clapped his palm in that of his brother-in-law. "Such rare treats as this you relinquished to

me the day you gave Mary Ball away!" and he laughed his big, hearty laugh, and looked towards the trees with a glance of glad impatience.

It was some little time before Ian returned. When he did so, he was accompanied by a young man of about twenty, strikingly like him in feature, and also by a negro servant.

"Canny man!" remarked Augustine to Joseph. "He hath reflected that some one must hold the horses while we have our little diversions."

Augustine and Joseph were on their feet in a moment, the nags' bridles slipped over their arms. At a motion from Ian the coloured boy gave up the weapons to the young man and came to stand by the horses, who sniffed suspiciously at the strange groom. Ian's companion came forward and bowed. He was a handsome youth, and, when he straightened himself, he examined the opponents with calm scrutiny. Then he stepped up to Joseph.

"Sir," he said, "my name is Hector McClean. I have the honour to act as second to my brother, Ian McClean, in this quarrel."

Joseph returned the bow. "Joseph Ball, at your service," he said, "and brother-in-law to this gentleman, Mr. Augustine Washington."

Augustine was noticing him out of the side of his eye, not without anxiety as to how far the peaceful Joseph was versed in the customary preliminaries to a polite encounter. It was, he imagined, the first time that Mr. Ball had had such duties laid upon him; he was acquitting himself creditably, but Augustine thought with some regret of the fiery supporter he could have found in Ned Carter or Charlie Mason in such an emergency.

The introductions were over, and Augustine withdrew, as in duty bound, while the seconds discussed preliminaries. Mr. Ian had his back to them, and appeared to be taking serious reckoning of the trees on the knoll. Augustine strolled up to the horses, quieted them with a pat or two which restored their confidence in their temporary keeper, and began to whistle a tune. Then he looked over his shoulder at the two intermediaries, who were still talking, and had apparently not come to the gist of the interview since the rapiers and pistol-case were still under young Hector's arm.

"Get to work, Joseph," called Augustine, good-humouredly. "We shall have a cold dinner if you stand talking all day."

Joseph approached him and said, "Mr. McClean leaves you the choice of weapons."

"Very polite, I'm sure," returned the other: "Rapiers."

"Thank God," sighed Joseph, who was looking alarmingly grey in the face. "I can stand anything but the report of a pistol."

"Don't trust the Scotchman's shooting, eh?" inquired Augustine. But Joseph had already returned to Hector. The pistol-case was placed on the grass, and the rapiers were duly examined and measured. Joseph touched them but gingerly, yet would not neglect a detail till he was assured of their fair and equal value.

"Poor Joseph," thought Augustine, "he will have an illness after this job, but he means to do it properly."

He was still more impressed when the seconds came to place their men. Young Hector, who was thoroughly enjoying himself, led Ian to a spot where he had the sun on his back.

"None of that, sir!" cried Joseph; "east and west, if you please."

Augustine chuckled with delight. "You hypocrite!" he whispered to his brother-in-law, "don't tell me you never fought a duel."

"God forbid!" ejaculated Mr. Ball; "but I'll not see you murdered if I can help it."

When the combatants were in place, their coats thrown on the sward, Augustine turned to his second. "There is one question I wish to ask," he said. "Will you find out in what degree Mr. McClean is entitled to represent the man we would like to see in his place?"

Joseph crossed the ground again, while an expression of angry surprise came into Ian's face. There was a moment's speech with Hector, two formal bows, and Augustine's second returned to his side.

"Cousin's son," he said.

"I wish it were closer," said Augustine, "but it is the nearest we can get at present."

Then the seconds drew back, Hector gave the word, having claimed that in return for the choice of weapons, and in a moment there was a fine bit of sword-play going on in the green field under the cold winter sun. Augustine was best at the thrust, but the other man made finer wrist-work. Brighter and brighter flashed the steel, in concentrating wheels of intolerable radiance, and the sharp music of meeting swords hummed on the morning air. Hector was breathless, his glance following each delicate evolution, lunge and parry, thrust and guard, volte and demivolte, with the joy of a trained fighter. Joseph was gasping, his hands clasped, his face

awry. His lips were moving in what might have been curses or prayers. He saw that his man was losing ground. Augustine, for all his hard frame and manly life, had been unused to such exercise in these latter years. He realized, as the point of Ian's rapier tore his shirt beneath his arm, that the other man was fighting with a craft and coldness that far outmatched his own. Then he lost his temper for a moment, and threw his whole weight into a terrific thrust at his adversary's breast, and in the same instant felt a slight sense of coldness in his left lung, just below the collar-bone. There was a cry from Joseph, and both men dropped the points of their rapiers. Ian's barely touched the grass. Augustine was leaning heavily on his, and it bent beneath his weight. A spreading splash of red showed on the lawn of his shirt.

"*MacCeallean na More!*" shouted young Hector, wild with joy. Ian cast a furious glance at him to repress the unprofessional outburst. Joseph had rushed to Augustine, and was tearing away the stained shirt with trembling hands, while the tears were rolling down his ashen cheeks.

"Why, man," said Augustine, sputtering blood and laughing weakly, "'tis you who look as if you had been pinked."

Then he toppled forward into Joseph's arms, nearly laying the good, stout man flat on the sward. Hector ran to help him, and between them they lowered Augustine till he lay on the grass, unconscious and deathly white. The dazzling, red, arterial blood was pumping from the hole below the collar-bone.

Ian came and stood over his foe. "Ye maun staunch that," he said, in broad Scotch, "or we'll hae oor mon awa' in a blink;" and he knelt down and tore a piece from the shirt to cram over the small ugly wound. As the blood ceased to flow under his firm pressure, Augustine's face took on a less deathly shade. Ian turned and said something in Gaelic to his brother, and the lad took the knoll in two bounds and disappeared between the trees. The negro groom had led the horses a little nearer, and was staring at the tragedy. Joseph lifted up his voice and cursed the day he was born.

"You need not be miscalling your progenitors, sir," said Ian, glancing up at him from where he knelt. "The gentleman's not dying yet, by a far cry. Mair's the pity, I should say, but I will not, seeing his plight and that he might—I say he might possibly have had some cause of quarrel with the McClean. That's not my affair any longer. He's a good swordsman, but dangerous bold at the thrust, and he sought the quarrel; my fellows will be here in a minute, and we'll be carrying him up to the house."

"To your house, you murderer?" cried Joseph, beside himself. "Never!"

Ian looked up again, with coldly glittering eyes. "You seem sadly lacking in experience, sir," he said. "The first rapier home kills the quarrel, whichever hand drives it there, and between gentlemen there's no more said, unless some one else has a curiosity to engage. Now, if I take my hand away, your friend bleeds to death, Mr. Ball, and 'tis not you who'll save him."

This aspect of the case brought Joseph to his knees on the stained grass at Ian's side. "For the love of Heaven, don't let him die, he cried. "'Twill kill his poor wife."

Ian wiped a little red froth from Augustine's lips, and then felt his pulse with one hand, still holding the other tight to the wound.

"He's better already," he remarked. "There's not much bleeding inside, I think. Did you say his wife? Ah, that'll be the lady who rated me so roundly about my horse some time ago. I've not forgotten her bonny wild face, nor her speech that was sharper than the north wind on the crags of Mull. Have no fear, sir, we'll save her handsome husband for her. 'Twere a sin to part such a couple."

"She'll never forgive me," wailed Joseph. "To your house, oh Lord!"

"There's no other for miles, and she'd rather see her husband there than brought home like a dead buck over the saddle, I take it," was Ian's somewhat brutal reply. The moaning of the non-fighter was becoming irritating to him.

Hector came out from the trees, accompanied by a troop of negroes bearing a shutter by way of a litter, and on to this Augustine was lifted, with infinite precaution, by Ian and his brother. The two seemed familiar with such necessities, terribly new and strange to poor Joseph. There was some fresh loss of blood resulting from the movement, but nothing alarming. Hector had brought some brandy, and forced a little between Augustine's lips before they attempted to raise him.

The stimulant recalled his senses for a moment. He opened his eyes and made a wry face. "What infernal—bad liquor!" he murmured.

Ian broke into sardonic laughter. "He'll do," he said. "Now, lads, gently. If you shake him, I'll order you all to be flogged."

Augustine closed his eyes again, and the men carried him as if they were stepping on velvet.

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Mary had been restless that day. It was not often that her well-controlled nerves gave her any trouble, but she was feeling less strong than usual, and sometimes shocked to find that she took less pleasure in the society of the children than she had done before little Mildred's death. Her heart seemed tired and full of fear lest some new blow should fall upon those she loved. Her belief in happiness had been rudely shaken, and she felt that it would not return. On this day she realized that she was not good company for the children, and she had the good sense to send them out for a long expedition to gather pine-cones in the woods, with their attendants, hoping to be in more harmony with their cheerful little minds when they should come back to her.

Then she took her favourite book of "Contemplations," and tried to read. But for once the moral axioms seemed foreign to her thoughts. She was craving for something more concrete, at once more human and more divine.

"This will never do," she told herself, closing the book and rising from her seat. "I am just wasting time, and pampering my bad temper. Work, Molly, you lazy creature, and sweep all these megrims away!"

So she sent for her little cedar tub, and had it put on a window-seat, tied a vast apron over her dress, and began to wash all the delicate blue and white china that the servants were never allowed to touch.

She was holding up a cream-jug to the light, and peering inside its recesses, so treacherously prone to harbour dust, when a coloured man came riding up to the front door. She saw him canter past the window, and her heart stood still, for that brief glimpse had shown her the great bay with the blue saddle-cloth edged with gold. She had not strength for the moment to go out and meet the man who had come home on the master's horse. Her limbs would not carry her, and she sank into a chair halfway to the door.

She heard the steps hastening to the front entrance, a sharp colloquy of some sort, and then she rose and made her way to the hall. Billy Lee, William's son and successor, came slowly towards her with a letter on a salver. His hand was shaking. Through the open door she could see the strange negro now standing at the horse's head.

Dumbly she reached out her hand, not daring to look in Billy's eyes. The superscription on the letter was in Joseph's hand-writing. Mary turned back into the parlour to read it alone.

Before she could open it, so certain was her sense of misfortune, she stood by the window where her trouble had found her, and looked out at her world as if to see it once more ere the blow fell. Then she opened the hastily-folded missive and read:

"My dear sister, don't be alarm'd, but come to us here. Augustine has had a trifling Accident of no Account, but is best not be moved at this present. Don't let This disturb you. Bring a doctor,

"Your loving Brother,
"JOSEPH BALL."

Mary sat down on the edge of the window-seat, at the imminent risk of smashing the cups and saucers, and her head put forward till it almost touched her knees. Then she slowly gathered up her strength and said, between her teeth, "I can bear it, my great God, I will show Thee that I can bear it."

In a few minutes she had changed her dress, thrown on a cloak, and was ready to ride away. No consideration for her own comfort would have induced her to go round by the roads in the great lumbering coach. Two of her servants, Billy and her own special handmaid, "Little Bet," were summoned to accompany her, carrying such, as in her ignorance of the true circumstances of the "Accident" she could think of as likely to be useful. Joseph's injunction to bring a doctor caused his horrible apprehension. He had forgotten how far they lived from such luxuries. However, one of the grooms was bidden to get over to Fredericksburg and summon the one physician who lived there.

"An' whar am I to bring him, ma'am?" asked the lad, as he puts spurs to his horse to make for the nearest ferry.

Then she remembered that she herself did not know. "Where is Mr. Washington?" she asked, turning to the messenger, who stood mute at the foot of the steps while she was making all these arrangements with lucid brain and ice at her heart. The man had pretended not to understand her hurried questions as to what had taken place. Indeed he had been sternly commanded by Joseph to disclose nothing of the truth, and Ian McClean had put the fear of God on all those who served him, so that there was no danger of such a command being disregarded. But this question he did answer.

"At Mr. McClean's, down Penebec way," he said. He was a gigantic, sullen negro, who looked defiantly at Mrs. Washington's crowd of dusky subjects.

Mary stared at him for an instant, the colour surging back into her cheeks, which had been so pale before. Then she turned sharply to her own groom. "You hear, Scipio," she said. "Mr. McClean's, the new plantation, seven miles down the road to Wakefield! Ride, you've a long round to make."

Then, as Billy led her horse to the step and she swung into her saddle, she said in her heart, "Great God, Thou knowest I will bear what I can—but not that my husband die in that place!"

Then she moved away, her servants following her, at a sharp trot which broke into a canter as soon as they were out in the road. She had even remembered to have the bay taken to the stables, and McClean's man was mounted on a fresh beast more fitted for his station.

CHAPTER II

IT took Mrs. Washington fully two hours to reach Cray, as the McCleans had named their place. With mortal suspense behind her saddle, it seemed as if the ride had lasted for days when she drew rein at the door of the house. She had seen nothing—marked nothing—after they entered the plantation, save the figure of Ian's servant speeding on before to show the road, having been summoned by her to do so. No one was waiting for her; Joseph was somewhere inside the rough, unfinished building, with Augustine. An old negro woman came forward and led her through a hall smelling of fresh-sawn pine which trickled gum here and there from a new crack. Mary hated the smell of pine gum ever afterwards. The place was dimly lighted with an iron ring hanging from the ceiling, and carrying guttering candles on two of its spikes. Just under it, on a bare table, two rapiers had been flung down; no one had remembered them. The candle-light played in bright light down their length, broken on one by a sticky stain which had marked the board beneath it. Mary saw it all, and felt suddenly sick. Then a door was opened, and she beheld, in the room beyond, a form on a low pallet, and Joseph, with his back to her, bending down over it. He turned at the sound of the creaking door, and, showing her a terrified face, put his finger to his lips. She paused, and motioned back the servants who would have followed; then she walked steadily to the bed, and looked down at her husband: his features were all distorted by the shadows from a candle which stood on a rush-bottomed chair behind his head. There was dead silence in the room but for the curious wheezing sound of Augustine's breathing. They had covered him with a plaid of dark tartan; but he had thrown it back ere he slept, and his hand and arm and part of his chest were exposed. She could not see his face clearly in the flickering half-light, but she noticed that the pillow looked less white than his cheek.

Joseph gripped her wrist, and put an arm round her, as if fearing she would faint; but she pushed him off with one hand so as to look into his face. Never had her senses been so alert, so completely under control.

"What happened?" she asked, more by the movement of her lips than by audible speech.

He answered in the same faint whisper—told her the kindly lie that he had taken hours to invent.

"Burst a blood-vessel. Better now!"

Then it was she who gripped his arm, and led him out, with steady, noiseless steps, into the hall, close under the wretched light. He saw, with horror, that the rapiers had been left there.

Mary turned her back on the table, and looked into her brother's eyes. Her own were dreadful, the dilated pupils making them appear black.

"Now," she said, still in a steady whisper, "I'll have the truth from you. 'Who did it?'"

"McClea," replied Joseph, meekly.

"God's curse on him," said Mary; and the words sounded like a sword-cut. "Why?"

"I don't know," moaned Joseph. "For Heaven's sake, Molly, be calm! This will kill you! He is better!"

"Better!" she repeated with concentrated scorn. "Better than when he left home this morning? Oh, my man," she suddenly wailed, "they have killed you!" And she leaned back against the table, white to the lips. The rapiers jingled behind her, and she drew herself up with a shudder. "Brother," she said, "I have cursed a man—may God forgive me—now you shall tell me why I was brought to it. What is the wound? Why did they quarrel? You are robbing me of these moments at my husband's side, and your own face tells me they may be counted!"

"Indeed, Molly," said Joseph, wiping his brow, "I believe the danger is over. 'Tis but a little touch—the left shoulder—and, as you have seen, he is sleeping peacefully. Since you *will* know—and the fools have left those cursed weapons here to tell you—Augustine refused to pass their road, swearing aloud that 'twas the land of a scoundrel, and not good enough for his horse's feet, or some such words—and McClea heard and came out of the copse and sought the quarrel. That is God's truth, my dear!"

"Then, God forgive you and me and all [of us!]" she said. "The quarrel was made many years ago. Now I'll go to him. Stay here, and I will call you if you are needed."

She passed back into the chamber, and Joseph staggered to a bench against the wall, and sat there with his eyes on the door. She had left it half open, and he could see by her shadow that she had knelt down beside the bed.

From the other end of the hall came Ian McClean, walking delicately.

"She has come?" he asked. "Good! Where is the doctor?"

"I forgot to ask her," Joseph replied.

"Maybe in this great, empty country of yours there is none!" said Ian. "'Tis big enough for an army to be lost 'twixt this and the next neighbour. But I'd be glad of a doctor. If Mr. Washington so much as moves in his sleep the cut may gape. 'Tis small but ugly." And he glanced with something like complacency at the stained rapier. Then his face lengthened, and he sprang to his feet. "Who left those d——d things there?" he whispered. "The poor woman might have seen them!"

"She did!" groaned Joseph.

"Damnation!" exclaimed Ian. Then he picked up the weapons and carried them away, one in each hand that they might not ring. In a few moments he returned, and threw a horse-blanket over the table.

"What's that for?" inquired Joseph, who felt as if he were witnessing events in a bad dream.

Ian turned on him sharply. "D'you think I'll let a woman see her good man's blood go black in my house? Ye've better stomach than heart, Mr. Ball, I'm thinking."

Then he went on tiptoe to the half-open door and listened, scrupulously refraining from glancing through the aperture.

"He'll do," he said, coming back to Joseph; "the sough in the windpipe's nothing! He's gey strong too—a great, stark callant! Call me if I'm wanted. I'll be o'er yonder." And he pointed to the far end of the hall, where, through an open door, a leaping fire lighted up a wide kitchen hearth.

And Mary kept her watch in the oppressive stillness of the inner chamber, where the bareness of floor and walls, the absence of all comforts, seemed to accentuate the misery of the moment. She placed the candle on the ground, and sat down on the hard chair, denying herself the luxury of watching Augustine's face too closely. He had often said laughingly that if she looked at him long enough he was sure to wake, and she knew how precious this sleep was for the renewing of his strength. The long winter night crept on, and Mary's limbs grew numb with cold, as her heart was numb

with pain. She could hardly pray. That was not her way in great stress of trouble. She held on to strength, since that meant her usefulness to Augustine. The prayers had all been prayed, in happy hours long past. Heaven knew that she would be loyal, and Heaven would take its way. If her man were spared she would pour out her soul in thankfulness; if he were taken she would not succumb. Conscious thought could go no further just now.

She had no clock to mark the time; she remembered idly how she had taken off the big gold watch which Augustine was wont to leave behind when he went out riding. She liked to have its cheerful companionship if he left her alone; but she had detached it from her girdle when she began to wash the china, and had laid it beside a book on the table. George would have come in and found it, or had Betty pulled it to the floor? Had they missed her welcome when they came in and sought for her? As the little familiar details presented themselves to her mind she was conscious of an overpowering longing to take her George on her knee and feel his strong young arms clasped round her neck, while he whispered, as he often did when she seemed preoccupied or sad, "I'm here, you know, mamma!"—as if all her troubles ought to disappear in the presence of such a champion. And George's father was lying dangerously wounded in his enemy's house! How soon could she take him home? Would he ever go home? It was a very terrible vigil, and Mary was to know but one more dreadful.

Augustine stirred. In an instant she was at his side. He had not opened his eyes, but seemed becoming restless. She knelt down and drew the plaid over him, and started at the burning touch of his hand. Then she whispered slowly and distinctly in his ear, "Lie quite still, my dearest one. You must not move!" And he gave a short sigh and lay quiet, as if in obedience to her command.

There was a sound of horses' hoofs at last, and Mary threw up her head and listened eagerly. Yes, that must be the doctor. How Scipio should be rewarded for finding him! She rose from her place, and stole out into the hall just in time to see a grey-haired man in uniform enter the door. He seemed stiff with riding, and his boots and spurs made a distracting noise in the quiet place. He wore a military overcoat of grey cloth, its pockets bulging with shapeless parcels. He removed the overcoat, pulled from its depths some bandages and medicaments, and laid them down on a seat, while he unbuckled his sword to place it in a corner.

Mary advanced towards him, and he looked up and saw the beautiful woman standing under the light, her golden hair falling in disorder round her face, her dress dust-stained from riding, her hands held out to him beseechingly, and a light in her eyes that told what she hoped of his omnipotence.

"Sir," she said, "I do not know your name; but I thank God you have come. He is asleep, but he is sore, sore hurt—oh, come quickly!"

"Madam," he replied gallantly, "your name stands for all that men most praise. Your husband and I were schoolmates. I am honoured in serving you. Heaven send I be of some use to Mr. Washington. 'Twill assist me in that course if I be told what hath befallen him."

Joseph had joined them, and now spoke. "A rapier-thrust—a treacherous button flying from a foil in a friendly bout—that is all."

Mary turned and gazed at him, with both revulsion and respect. Her detestation of all that resembled untruth was tempered by admiration of Joseph's patent wisdom in keeping the quarrel from becoming food for gossip.

"And where is this wound?" inquired the soldierly doctor, looking from one face to another, and drawing his own conclusions.

"In the left shoulder, just below the collar-bone," answered Joseph quickly, wishing Mary away, that he might more particularly describe the distressing flow of blood which had so alarmed him earlier in the day.

"A fair, safe place," remarked the doctor, "if 'tis but high enough! Gentlemen who lose buttons off foils should be all collar-bone to play such games unhurt!"

"Pray come, sir," said Mary. "I fear to leave him long." And she led the way into the bedroom.

As she and the new-comer paused beside the wounded man, he opened his eyes and looked up at them, first as if in a dream, then with an expression of bewilderment, followed by a sudden smile.

"Why, Arbuthnot, dear man," he said, "who'd have thought——" Then he broke off, and began to cough, and a little red moisture showed on his lips.

Mary knelt down and wiped it away. The pallet was so low that the doctor seemed to tower above her there. Augustine had not been surprised by his wife's presence. As yet he had not realized where he was.

"Yes," said Colonel Arbuthnot, "I'm the man—used to carry

you to school when you were a small boy and I a big one! I always meant to come and pay my respects to Mrs. Washington; but there, soldiering is an absorbing business! Doctor Markham had been carried off to see Madame Thornton through a pressing engagement in the nursery, ha! ha! and I heard your servant was asking for him, and volunteered. I'm as good as he at a clean wound, now, for all I don't write 'Medico' after my name. You lie still, my friend, and don't speak or move! I must have a look at this scratch. How have your ignoramuses treated it, I wonder?"

With that he turned back the clothes with a deft hand, and made his examination. Mary felt the sickness at her heart rise and choke her as she saw the torn, blood-stained shirt, the bare, broad breast which had seemed such a bulwark of strength and tenderness, all marked with half-dried tricklings from a red patch on the shoulder, where Ian had applied some old-world salve on a wad of rag. The composition of the salve was a treasured secret among the fighting clansmen, and they carried it with them on each adventure. Rough as the dressing was, it had effectually done its work.

"Beautiful!" murmured Colonel Arbuthnot. "Who performed this fine bit of healing surgery?"

"It was done before I came," said Mary, hastily. "Oh, sir, can we not take these dreadful stained things away and make him more comfortable?"

Augustine looked up with a reflection of his old merry smile, and murmured, "You must be clean, or die, when my wife is in charge, Arbuthnot!"

"If you speak again I'll turn her out of the room, and not let you see her for a week!" was the soldier-doctor's instant declaration, delivered with such a terrifying grimace that poor Mary, unstrung by sudden relief, ran out of the room and sat down on the bench in the hall, laughing weakly while the tears coursed down her cheeks.

Joseph came and took her hand. "Poor girl, poor Molly!" he said again and again, and she was so worn out that she found his sympathy comforting. When he poured out a glass of wine from the bottle which a servant had silently placed on the table, she drank it thankfully, and recovered herself enough to feel distinctly grateful to the McCleans for not having shown themselves to her.

They acted with the same silent consideration in the days that followed. The house, such as it was, big, bare, unfinished, was

ceded to Mr. Washington, his wife, friends, and servants. Ian busied himself with the more distant parts of the long-neglected estate, Hector spent his time chiefly among the horses, and Mary had noted his fine riding with sympathetic appreciation. She never saw the brothers indoors, but all that hospitality could do for her comfort in the circumstances was done; the housekeeping had evidently been of the rough-and-ready bachelor sort, but the servants were instructed to take their orders from Billy, Lu, and the waiting-maid; a messenger was always ready to ride over and fetch anything that might be wanted from Pine Grove, and little by little Mary lost the sense of being in an enemy's camp. When she could forget who it was that had hurt her Augustine, she felt something like a pitying toleration for the brothers, strange men in a strange land, striving to cope with conditions new to them, unfriended and uncounselled. No woman of Mary's sensitiveness could remain indifferent to the silent delicacy which robbed an otherwise intolerable position of its most disagreeable aspects. "These men have either good hearts or amazing good manners!" she said to herself. "And manners would need to be good indeed to enable them to live in an outhouse as they do, in order to leave their house to me, free of the discomfort of their presence. I shall e'en be forced, if I have any courtesy left, to thank them, actually to thank them before I go! Oh what a world of contradictions! Good and bad, where are your dividing lines? They melt and mix till a poor woman can judge of neither!"

Needless to say that, by the time Mary was calm enough to indulge in these philosophic reflections, Augustine was far on his road towards recovery. Colonel Arbuthnot stayed for three days, not, as he explained, because it was necessary for the patient, but merely to prevent sweet, masterful Mrs. Washington from making him too clean and comfortable for his health! Mary had sent to Pine Grove for a waggon load of things, and now wished to move Augustine into the easier bed which had been among them; but the colonel was stern, and would not even permit her to raise the sick man's arm to change his shirt, a detail which troubled her sorely. When at last his soldierly guardian permitted him to be lifted, there was a slight loss of blood, which so alarmed her that she took all ensuing orders very meekly. After a fortnight, during which Arbuthnot rode down from Fredericksburg every second or third day, she paid a visit to Pine Grove, and had the satisfaction of finding the children well there under the beneficent rule of their aunt Mildred, who had taken for her second husband "old

Henry Willis," a veteran widower who had wooed her first in her early youth. George and Betty and the younger boys were wild with delight at seeing their mother again, and George begged hard to be taken to visit his father. Mary was thankful that the colonel's orders were strict enough to warrant her refusal of the request. She had done her best to lay aside all enmity towards the McCleans, but it would have gone against her womanhood in some violent fashion to see her little son under their roof.

The return to Pine Grove was fixed, with Colonel Arbuthnot's consent, for the 22nd of February, George's birthday. The kind man said, with a twinkle in his eye, that he would ride over with the party "just to keep Mrs. Washington in order!" It was a beautiful clear morning, with the first breath of spring in the air, and hazy sunshine lying on field and hedgerow. The great yellow coach, with its emblazoned panels and its team of four greys, stood at the door, postillions mounted, and two grooms in the Washington liveries ready to spring up behind. Cushions were in place, the little case of restoratives ready to hand, and then Augustine, dressed for the first time, and looking strangely paler, thinner, taller, than he had ever seemed before, came out into the sunshine, leaning on Arbuthnot and Joseph Ball. He paused on the step and looked round. As if in answer to his glance, Ian and Hector stepped forward from the end of the still unroofed verandah, grave, courteous, dark men, with unmistakable nobility of step and bearing.

Augustine disengaged his right hand and held it out to Ian. "Mr. McClean," he said, looking his host in the face, "my wife and I can never thank you properly for all the kindness and courtesy you have shown us. I trust that you will overlook the extreme inconvenience to which we have put you, and permit us in the future to attempt some slight return of your great hospitality. Such gallant gentlemen as you and Mr. Hector here should be gladly welcomed as friends and neighbours in our Virginia. I hope that you will allow me to reckon you among mine."

Ian had returned his hand-clasp, and now a slow flush of pleasure rose to his face. "I do thank you, Mr. Washington," he said simply. "My brother and I will try not to be unworthy of that distinction."

Augustine held out his hand to the younger man. "Good-bye, Mr. Hector," he said, "when you and your brother come over to Pine Grove I hope you will honour me by selecting a mare from my stables who shall prove a worthy mate to your noble

black, thereby establishing a friendly emulation in time to come on the Fredericksburg racecourse."

Hector's fine young face lighted up with pleased surprise, and he shook Augustine's hand warmly. "You are much too good, sir," he said. "A fine brood mare is the one thing I do most desire!"

Then Augustine was helped into the coach, and Mary came out to follow, dressed in her purple fur-lined cloak, its hood falling back and leaving her head bare. Her face was grave, but she paused, and turning first to Ian, and then to Hector, said, "Good-bye, sirs, I do thank you very gratefully for your many kindnesses, and wish you a large measure of prosperity."

Then she dropped a stately curtesy, the men both bowed, and Ian stepped forward to assist her into the coach. But Mary seemed not to see the proffered hand. Even now she could not bring herself to touch it.

Augustine saluted his late entertainers with a kindly gesture, and the whole procession moved away, Joseph and the Colonel riding one on either side of the yellow coach, which rolled heavily from side to side on the fresh-cut, uneven road.

"What'll you be at now, Ian?" said Hector, as it disappeared at last. "I'm off to the stables. Eh, but it's fine of him to give me one o' the Washington mares!" The Pine Grove breed was famous in the country side.

"I'll be writing to the McClean," said Ian, and he turned and went into the house.

He was not a ready writer, and did not finish his letter in one day. When at last it was sent into Fredericksburg to be mailed on the next outgoing ship, it ran as follows:

"To the McClean at His Castle of Duart in Mull in
Scotland. (Over-seas.)

"HONOURED KINSMAN,

"If a longer period than Customary hath elapsed since Last I did Write, the Reasons of the Delay are here set Forth and I trust will discharge me from Negligence in your Service. Some five Weeks Ago I chanced to Have a Conversation with the Gentleman you wot of, Augustine Washington By Name, and a Landowner in These parts, a Fact long since Known to you but set down Here chancing it Hath escaped your Memory. He making Some Disparaging Comment upon your Land, Did turn aside his Horse in Order not to Pass over it, with a Reference to the Owner of the Said Land, which I will not repeat. Summary: I sent for Weapons and we did Fight. The Said Mr. Washington,

a Fine arm but too Careless eye, Did receive a Hurt, and That he might not Expire on the road to his own House, was brought into Mine, or as I should say Yours, I being here but as Your Bailey so speaking. He had with him a Fat Peaceable Kinsman, one Joseph Ball, who as I judge Hath had more need to be expert with Pen or Ell Rod than with Small Arms. He did make a sad Pother over a Light Matter, paling much at the Blood letting, Which I counted fortunate since His Person more favoured Apprehension of purplish discolourment and an Apoplexy, but a Gentleman natheless. I learned him brother to Madam Washington For whose coming He sent with needless haste. She is a Fine Woman but likes us not. I have kept them Here For five Weeks, and have Done to my Ability for Them as you would wish, Leaving House to Their Accommodation, providing Them with all Due services, and Sleeping me and Hector in the Byre Behind the House Place. This Day they have departed, Mr. Washington safe Recovered but Weak and speaking us Very Handsome to his Acknowledgments. Madam more Reserved but distinguished Polite, still seeing in me, as Doubtless a Fond Wife must, the Wouldoe slayer of her good Man. No woman hath ever comprehended the grounds of a genteel quarrel. What These truly be, my dear Kinsman and Chief may know better than his poor cousin, but His Honour is Whole and Safe with the Same.

"Having now been in These Parts through two or three seasons, and thereby gathered some measure of experience, I can tell you Robin that the land is Fine Gold but suffering overmuch from Its own Richness fallow so long. I have felled eight Hundred acres of Good Trees, first to clear the Ground, Secondly to provide Timber for the Building, which goes Forward well But for the Let of these past Weeks, when the sound of a Hammer would Have Brought Madam out to Say we would be killing Her Husband anew by disturbing His Rest. She hath fine flashing Eyes. I was minded to Flog Hector But Desisted. He is grown Finely Strong in this Climate. He did Leave the Rapiers on a Table, endangering the Temper of one which was still wet, and causing the Poor Lady a manner of Shock when she Beheld Them. Your Name hath not Been mentioned save before We engaged, when Mr. Washington caused the Fat person to Inquire of my Degree of Kindred to Yourself and was heard to Regret it was not Closer.

"I have Thirty Acres already planted with Tobacco, and do propose to add more next year. It is a profitable Crop. We have besides many good fruit trees Which I found growing Here,

Many fields prepared for Oats (poorer than the Scottish ones however) fine Wheat, Rye, buckwheat, Pease. There is a plant Called Maize or Indian Corn, which I do assure you hath astounded me for its beauty (like unto a thinnish fir cone of Gold), its sweet Savour, and Easy growing. I Will not excuse my Baileydom for sending no money to you as yet, It being mostly underground, But I Trust that the End of This Year will show you a profitable Return. Am fair well satisfied with my Overseer, a Dutchman, recommended to me in Norfolk Port by one Jones, a sea captain who commands a Vessel Plying between This and London. If you think good to send me young Hamish and his cousin Sandy Would Prefer them to the Dutchman who is foul mouthed and quarrelsome when in liquor. We have Eighty black Slave men, with some Two Score Women, ill-favoured as Satan but Buxom strong and promising good Increase for Your Service. I did Buy them cheap off a Ship That was not let Land them having had a Contagious Distemper on the Voyage. Methought me and Hector full Seasoned to Such, Owners being loth to Feed their Freight some Twenty Days for Nothing, so Went on Board offered Low Price and closed, paying somewhat down for their Keep. Any dying in the meantime to be deducted from payment when said goods should be delivered. None died. Brought Them here Shortly after, together with Three or Four acquired in the Port of Norfolk speaking English and wearing clothes, to serve in the House. The rest do labour in the fields, are docile since I Feed them generously, and they have been given Breeks and Shirts of Nankin Cloth and coatees of duffle for Winter. Women noisy but cheerful, and pleased with gay Shifts and fine Red Skirts, These being Taken away if They do Quarrel.

"Hector has spent Two Hundred and Forty Pounds English of your Money on horseflesh, very good, and Mr. Washington promises Him a Fine brood Mare. In Two Years more I do hope my Honoured Chief will forgive my so long deferring this present report, and that he will one day visit This property of His, Which I will forward to the best of my Ability. God bless Thee, Robin. This is a fine Country.

"Thy friend and Kinsman to Command,

"IAN McCLEAN."

"Given at the Chief's Manor of Cray, King George County in Virginia This Twenty-fifth Day of February, in the Year of Our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and Forty-one.

"Post Scriptum. But that He cried out for joy when I

touched my man (a sort of Triumphant the more excusable in so young a fellow) I was satisfied with Hector's Deportment."

The letter reached Scotland in the following June. McClean took it out to read in the shade of the Menhie stone, where a few spare blossoms, thin and sweet, danced in the soft west wind. There he read Ian's story, and each time he found Mary's name in it he paused and looked out to the shining sea, as if calling up her face. His own was seamed with deepest lines of sorrow, yet there was a light of something like hope in his grave eyes. Ian's story seemed to touch him but little. It was the mere name of her that made the letter precious. When he had read and read again he folded the paper and put it away in his pocket, and stood up, facing the sea, the wind that had travelled so far playing cool and fresh in his hair.

"No, Ian," he said aloud, "the chief will not come yet to his Manor of Cray over-seas; maybe he will never come. Ten years have I clomb, striving out of the pit, a step up, a slip back—through suffering unspeakable—for the bare hope that its lowest depth hold not my soul for ever. 'Live kind and true,' you said, Mary, to the hell-bought wretch I was. When you have been in Paradise a thousand years, my dear, I may be beginning to do your bidding. But the thousand years will not be given me to learn those ways. These ten have been even as a thousand; and the sight of your sweet face would be my death e'en now. In ten years more, if mercy hold, I might creep and hide to look on you from very far off, and creep away again. We'll not meet Mary till I've sloughed the beast's fell and the Lord hath spoken."

Then he turned to go down to the Castle. On one of the boulders on the slope a woman was sitting with a young child in her arms. Her hair blazed red in the westering sun, and she looked towards the chief with a slow smile of welcome. He came towards her, and she stood up—a pale, serene woman in her matronly maturity. The strong hand that held the child wore a broad wedding-ring.

Robin came close, and laid a hand on her shoulder. "Were ye waiting for me, lass?" he said. "I was but yon by the Menhie stone. Ah, but the bairn grows finely!" And he smiled kindly on mother and son.

"I'm thinking we'll call him Robin," said Jean. "'Twas his brither's name, and 'tis yours, my man. And you and the wean hae brought the heart back into my breast."

"We will call him Robin," replied McClean, gravely; "and may the heart never ache for him nor me, Jean."

CHAPTER III

"YOU are over-tired, Augustine," said Mary, as her husband dismounted from his horse, and came slowly up the steps. "Surely you could leave things at Wakefield in Blanchard's hands. 'Tis such a long ride."

She was by his side, relieving him of whip and riding-coat. He looked weary, and did not speak for a moment, only touching her hair with a caressing gesture.

"Yes, I am a little tired," he said, as he sat down on a seat in the porch. "The air seems heavy to-day. We shall have a storm, I think;" and he looked out at the evening sky, where bronze-coloured clouds were shutting out the sunset.

Mary shivered. "I hope not," she said quickly.

He took her hand, and held it to his cheek that was paler than it used to be.

"I am always a little glad when we have a storm," he said. "Does that sound unkind? You see, wife, but for that one small weakness which makes you shudder and go pale at the thunder-claps, I should not remember that you are just a little mortal woman at all; and a man that adores his wife as a piece of heaven walking by his side is glad to know that, after all, he has some hold on her! I'd have a thunderstorm every day just to have you run to my arms and hide your face on my shoulder! There's a confession for a ten years' husband!"

"Why, 'tis nearer twelve," she answered, smiling. "George is eleven years old! Lack-a-day, my dearest, we are terrible old lovers! And to think you have not yet found out all my faults! Dear love, stay blind for ever!"

"Have you found out all mine, Molly?" he asked, looking down at her as she knelt, in the old way, beside his chair.

"Ay," she said—"a list as long as my arm! Will you have some of them?"

"Break them to me gently, wife," he answered, looking into the eyes that were his lamps of love. "I heard you telling the

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boys to take pattern by their father, this morning, so I'm less terrified than I might be.'

"God send they may," she said; "their faults will be marvellous fine virtues! You are convicted of being the husband whom all women in their dreams desire, and but one unworthy creature does possess. You are also accused of being a loving, wise father, a merciful, just master, a friend who confers honour on all who call him so! And, my dear, I love you!"

He did not answer in words, but took her face in his two hands, and kissed her brow. Then he said, in a tone graver than his usual one:

"It seems wonderful, Molly! Twelve years, and never a hot word nor a cold one! I knew not that such things could be. 'Twould have seemed too good to last!"

"Ah, never say that!" she cried, touched to sudden emotion such as she rarely showed now. "All that is good and fair should last for ever—'tis only the other things that can die." A sharp little wind came rustling up from the waves, and Mary rose hastily to her feet. "Come in, my dearest; it is turning cold, and you must not get chilled, or we shall have you coughing again;" and she threw the coat over his shoulders, and dragged him into the house. It was early autumn, and a fire was burning in the great, low parlour.

"The place seems very quiet," remarked Augustine. "Have the children not come back from school yet?"

"No," said his wife; "but they will be here soon now. George says he will not permit Charles to go at 'Planter's Pace' yet, he being too young! Ah, there is Betty! She and her pony always come scrambling in as if they were chasing a fox into the porch!"

Betty burst in, all curls and roses, and threw herself into her father's arms, whence she looked up slyly at her mother. She knew what was coming.

"That is scarcely the way to enter a room, child," said Mary. "You might be disturbing your father and me in important conversation."

"Yes, ma'am," replied the little maid. "But then I didn't; and I was so glad to see you both."

"Not more glad than we to see you, Betty," said her mother, laying her hand on the pretty head that nestled on Augustine's shoulder. "But now jump down, and go out, and give us the pleasure of seeing you come in again, like a courteous little lady this time. Do you think you remember how?"

"Why, of course, mamma!" Betty exclaimed, slipping off Augustine's knee. Then she ran out, they both watching her with loving amusement that yet would not spare her the gentle lesson. In a moment she reappeared, stalked gravely up to her parents, pointed her right foot, drew back the left, and bowed low with her hand on her heart.

Augustine greeted the performance with a peal of laughter. "That is George's bow, you little monkey—not yours!"

"Now let us have Betty's curtsey," said Mary, smiling, but firm. Ah, the beauty of the little thing as she drew herself up, took her blue silk skirt in her two dimpled hands, swept one small foot behind her, and sank down lower and lower till the silk lay round her on the ground, and her rosy face seemed the centre of a flower! Without a tremor she rose again—each execution the perfection of grace—stood poised for one instant on tiptoe, and then ran to her mother with open arms for her reward.

"Do that one first next time, my child," said Mary, bending down and giving her a kiss.

"My mamma never kisses me till she's quite pleased," Betty had confided to one of her cousins. "But *then* it *is* nice!"

The two years that had passed away had brought more developments than changes in the Washington home. George and Betty presented strong contrasts of character, but were inseparable allies, ruling unquestioningly over their three little brothers. Charles, the youngest of these, was at this time about five years old, and had just been promoted to the honour of going to school with his seniors. It was but a parish school, some two miles distant from Pine Grove, and the children greatly enjoyed their rides thither in the morning, and home again at night. Betty and Samuel generally returned earlier than George, who felt responsible not only for the safety of the two smaller boys, but for their horsemanship. He was much distressed to find that, in spite of his admonitions, the fat little legs would still stick out at a violent angle from the equally fat ponies' sides, and if they met other riders in the country roads, would put himself and his steed between them and the little brothers, who, he felt, as yet did no credit to their teacher. George, already a fearless and graceful rider, was always the head of the little band; he was a brave, handsome boy, resembling both father and mother, as the first child of happy love so often does. Full of spirits, ready for any adventure, the gallant little lad had a deep fund of sense and principle, and never shirked nor neglected his responsibilities towards his juniors. Mary knew that in all circumstances where

those two great qualities—conscience and courage—were required, George would not fail. Did his quick spirits lead him into some boyish scrape, the other children were never involved in it; and his first step, on realizing what he had done, was always to seek out his mother and say, "I fear you will be displeased, ma'am; but I hope you will forgive me. I have——" lamed a pony, perhaps, or left the gate of the farmyard open, or torn a Sunday coat in climbing for apples, or what not. Mary was never left in doubt as to the author of a bit of mischief if the author were George; and both she and Augustine made a point of encouraging this openness in all the children by awarding very light punishment when the fault was bravely confessed. Both of them would have preferred to lose everything they possessed rather than frighten a child into cowardly deceit.

Mary seemed to have grown little older in these years. Her beauty had not waned, but deepened in some ways, with the fullness of its splendid maturity. There were no lines on her face, but the modelling touch of time and experience had brought out some characteristics that had hardly showed themselves in the sweetness and promise of her girlhood. The dark blue eyes were clear and deep with accepted knowledge; the mouth, sweet as ever, had been moulded to firmer lines of courage and command; the broad, white brow was held a little higher than of yore, as became the invisible crown of wifehood and motherhood it carried. The golden hair had darkened to more sombre glory, the beautiful erect figure moved with stately grace. She could carry about with her a daily anxiety without betraying it to those around her; her faith had grown with her heart, and that no longer questioned Heaven's decrees. Steadily she had set herself to eliminate the smallest trace of bitterness from her apprehending of these. All in all she had been wrapped in love, and happiness, and peace such as, she knew, fell to the lot of few. The unforbidden pain of little Mildred's death was fully accepted now; such wisdom and love as had given her all the rest, must be trusted to have acted wisely and kindly towards the innocent child whose short, sharp suffering had in its moment hurt the mother's faith. With earnest prayer Mary sought to make each action of her life pleasing to the Almighty, to take His rulings to heart and make them loved and respected by all her household. Her conscience at rest, her duties fulfilled to the best of her power, she felt that her trust in God was equal to such tests as might in time to come be imposed on it.

The anxiety which never left her was occasioned by her

husband's health. At first Augustine appeared to have recovered his strength with unusual rapidity; through the summer that followed his unexpected quarrel with Ian McClean, he had been as energetic, to all appearances, as before, constantly in the saddle, overlooking the administrations of his different properties himself, and covering the long distances which separated them by riding hard and constantly. When the fox-hunting began in the autumn, he had been as keen as ever, hunting his well-trained hounds himself, full of their triumphs when he came home in the evening. But after the two or three weeks during which he had been in the saddle, through all the daylight hours, there came a fine, bright morning when he started out gaily and returned an hour afterwards, to his wife's amazement, saying that he had changed his mind, and had handed over the pack to Ned Carter for the day. Then he went into his office, and busied himself with books and papers. When he came in to dinner he changed his coat, and Mary, picking it up to have it brushed and put away, emptied the pockets as she always did, laying his money in a pile under the high looking-glass, his papers and letters beside it where he would find them when wanted. That day she found something else, a pocket handkerchief deeply stained with blood. She stood looking at it for a moment, remembering with a shudder the stains on her husband's shirt the day he was wounded, and the rage of fear which had then possessed her lest she should lose him. Impressions went very deep with Mary; that one experience had given her such an overwhelming horror of bloodshed that she could not bear to hear George asking his father a boy's eager questions about soldiers and battles. The sight of the pocket handkerchief brought it all back. Then she scolded herself for her fancifulness, let Mammy sweep the thing up with other linen to be carried out to the laundry, and came downstairs to dinner. Augustine was grave, and looked greatly fatigued. Also he had no appetite, and a little cough which now occasionally troubled him, was heard more than once. Each time it came he put his handkerchief to his lips, glancing at his wife to see if she were watching him. She always watched him, but with such tender tact that he was unconscious of her vigilance.

She saw each movement, and a great fear came upon her. She smiled and talked to him about the children (away at school all the afternoon), telling him some story of Betty's quaint absurdities which always made him laugh. And he laughed now—and the laugh ended with a slight choke, and the handkerchief came from his lips with a vivid red spot on it, which he did not notice at the

moment, but which told her all. She sat for a moment rigid and dumb, then took up the thread of the conversation, and when they rose from table suggested that he seemed fatigued and would do well to lie down. When she had left him sitting in an easy-chair (it was all he would do to humour her) she brought him his favourite book, a well-worn volume of old English plays, carefully forgot his pipe, and left him, to fly to the stables and send a messenger off for Colonel Arbuthnot, who had not yet relinquished all jurisdiction over his late patient. Long hours must pass ere he came, and Mary, frenzied with anxiety, showed none of it, but went about her tasks with trembling hands and heavy heart. Augustine fell asleep in his big chair, and Mrs. Washington ran out to meet Colonel Arbuthnot in the plantation. She had to wait nearly an hour, and very long it seemed. At last he came, and when she stopped him, he dismounted, walking up to the house with her, while she described what had occurred. When he understood, his face grew grave and he looked away from her.

"Tell me, please, colonel," she said. "I am horribly alarmed, but it is right that I should know. Does this mean that my husband is in danger—that his lungs are affected?"

"It may not," he said; "but to tell you the truth, madam, it may. Hath he been riding more than usual of late?"

"The hunting has begun." Mrs. Washington sighed. "You know what that means. But it never hurt him before."

"He must give it up," said the colonel, in his short, soldierly way. "That scratch last winter was nothing very serious, but I warned him that it had reached the lung, and that any violent exercise might cause a breaking out of the weak spot. I take it that is all that hath happened now. But he must be careful—and you must persuade him to keep quiet. Do you think you can, Mrs. Washington?"

But Mary did not answer. She had turned her face away that he might not see her wretchedness. The quarrel, prepared so many years ago, had been of her making. She did not regret so much the telling of its story to Augustine (she could not have brought herself to accept his trust and love without doing so) as she regretted the passing weakness which had laid upon her a story to tell. In that moment it would have gone hard with Robin McClean had he come up for judgment before her. As she had once said to her husband, so she said to herself now, "What but harm can come to us from him and his house? Would to God I had never heard his name!"

When Augustine, in his kindly generosity, had invited Ian and

Hector to Pine Grove, Mary had received them with frigid courtesy, and had entreated him to bring them there no more. "You cannot understand," she said, "what the sight of them is to me. It is of God's mercy that you were not killed. Give all you like—if you dream that you have a debt to pay, pay it a hundred times over, but spare me the sight of these men. It wars on my Christianity."

So when Arbuthnot gave her his opinion, she could find no words to answer for a moment. Memory and apprehension were uniting to oppress her most intolerably.

Then had followed Arbuthnot's visit to Augustine—announced as an unpremeditated one—his skilful questioning which elicited the truth—a bit of advice, a few prohibitions, encouraging words afterwards to the anxious wife, who understood them far less sincere than his recommendations of complete repose and quiet for her husband—and the colonel had ridden away, his face taking on a look of great sadness when Mary could see it no more.

"A fine, strong man like that!" he said to himself, "why should it happen? 'Tis but the beginning of the end. Poor soul—and she adores him."

After that the colonel found constant excuses for coming over to Pine Grove, and after each visit Mary would walk a little way down the road with him, telling him of her hopes and fears. Sometimes Augustine seemed quite well again, and at such times nothing would keep him indoors. Then a slight cold, or over-fatigue, would cause a reappearance of the trouble. It was significant to his own conception of its seriousness that he gave up the hunting of his own accord, making over his cherished pack to the mastership of Ned Carter, to the unbounded delight of Mrs. Sally, who seemed as far from abandoning the skittish ways of her girlhood as ever.

The two years had been very long ones to Mary. They had also been years of silent strengthening for whatever the future should hold. There would be no more rebellions; she kept steadily before her eyes the beacons of Trust and Hope. But it seemed to her that she had never truly prayed before, so constant, so intense were the prayers that her husband might renew his strength and remain by her side. He had become so accustomed to the short but recurring attacks of his disease that he had ceased to think about it, except as an inconvenience and a hindrance. Once, in the summer just past, he had found Mary looking at him for a moment with all the darkness of her terror in her eyes, and had quizzed her for her nervousness.

"Why, Mary," he said, laughing, "you look as if you had just heard your death-warrant, or mine. Come, come, my dear, I am not going to leave you at present. If I am taking two years to die of a rapier-thrust, I may as well take twenty! I have just had an attack of gout, you know, and that disease only comes to those who shall die old! You'll see me a stout old fellow of most vile temper and shapeless feet, yet. So cheer up, and prepare for that dispensation."

But of late he had felt his hold upon life loosening, in spite of his cheerful resolve to hold on to it to the last moment. He experienced no personal terror at the possibility of being cut off in his happy prime; but the thought of the cherished wife and children left without their leader and protector caused him the most acute pain. Carefully he set all his affairs in the most accurate order, making provision for each child to receive his portion of the inheritance as he should attain majority, the entire government meanwhile being left in their mother's strong hands. Having done all that he could to ensure the welfare of his dear ones, he faced the future with characteristic cheerfulness and courage, never speaking of his own fears, and feigning to make light of those which others entertained for him.

It is sometimes the sad privilege of love to know when its treasure is being taken away from it. Mary knew. With each month that passed she felt hers being definitely though slowly withdrawn, and her hands tightened their hold, her heart burnt with purer, holier fire; she would have cried out as she had cried to her child, "Stay with me, I have life enough for both!" What wonder that she laughed rarely, that even Betty's sallies, which caused Augustine such joyous mirth, brought a smile more of affection than amusement to her lips? She heard through everything a call sounding, low but terribly clear, and it seemed difficult to listen to other things. Yet she was not depressed. By a very strong effort she kept herself calm, cheerful, alert to all that regarded the children's welfare, so jealous of it, indeed, that no smallest detail escaped her scrupulous care. Also she gave them her sweet, ready sympathy in the thousand happenings of their childish lives. George was, in some ways, older than his years, and understood something of the conditions without requiring to have them explained to him. He would keep the young ones away if "papa" were tired; would delay talking about his own vividly eager interests if his mother seemed preoccupied. Many a time he would wait day after day, full of some matter of tremendous importance to his boyish soul, till Mary turned to him

and said, "Now, my son, we will go and have a walk in the woods. I have been so busy all the week!"

Then, as they roamed in the pine woods, he would tell her all that had been in his heart for days; incidents at school, plans for wonderful undertakings in the near future when the holidays brought a band of young friends and cousins to his standard, questioning about things he had read and which had, perhaps, sorely puzzled the honest heart and expanding brain, all his little world was laid at her feet, for her to judge of, appraise, pronounce upon, condemn. And Mary would marvel at the self-restraint which had kept the boy silent for weeks, perhaps, on subjects of such overwhelming importance to him, at the rare consideration which would not interfere with the many claims on her time and attention, which made him content to wait until the precise moment came when she could be all his, without let or scruple or fatigue. Also the power and precision of his memory struck her as almost portentous. With clear, deliberate accuracy he would recount a chain of events which it would have puzzled many a grown-up person to describe without lapses or digressions. He seemed incapable of forgetting what he had learnt when he had once decided that the thing was worth remembering.

Just now, in this spring of his twelfth year, he was very much exercised about his schoolmaster, and had been making up his mind to speak to his mother on the subject. He had long recognized the unspoken rule that his father was not to be troubled with unnecessary discussions, and also that Augustine preferred to leave the reins of government in his wife's hands.

Betty had been sent off to prepare for supper. Mary and Augustine heard the boys' ponies trotting up to the house. Then George came in, looking proud and happy, followed by his little brother.

"Good evening, madam. Good evening, sir," said the boy, the formal greeting which good manners imposed not interfering with the affection of glance and tone, even as the graceful bow of salutation took nothing from the manliness of his bearing.

"Good evening, my son," said Augustine, with equal courtliness, while he smiled on his firstborn.

George stepped up to his mother and kissed her hand, and then Charles trotted in with the rollicking ease of scarcely passed babyhood, and held up his face to be kissed.

"I've been very good, very good," he announced, "and there weren't any puddles in the pothooks to-day, and George is going to let me ride real fast to-morrow!" It all came out in a breath.

"It is quite true," said George, looking down at his small brother with pride. "He knows all his letters already, and Teddy Mason, who is six, has only just finished learning his!"

"So Master Hobby is pleased with you, Charles?" said Augustine. "I am glad to hear that! But see here, young man, you need not clean those muddy little boots on my breeches! Mamma will have something to say to us both if you do!"

"Mamma says Charles must not hug his father to death!" said Mary, and then caught her breath for having pronounced the ominous word in joke. But she lifted Charles away from his father, and held him a minute in her own arms, kissing the flushed face, and quite careless of the fact that the muddy boots were leaving visible traces on her own gown. Augustine loved to see her richly dressed, and in these early days of 1743 she was wearing a brown brocade with a touch of orange in its meandering pattern, recalling the tinted glories of last year's autumn woods. The bodice sank away from her white neck with falling ruffles of soft old lace, and the short elbow sleeves, edged with the same delicate fabric, left her arms bare and round and beautiful.

"Mamma," said George, looking up at her admiringly as she stood in the firelight holding her little boy so easily and proudly, "I've seen a little girl who is almost as pretty as you!"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Augustine, with earnestness.

"Yes," returned George, "almost. Papa, how old must a man be to fall in love?"

"Anything from ten to ninety!" replied his father. "Were you thinking of beginning, sir?"

"No, sir," said George, slipping round behind his father's chair, where he could escape Augustine's laughing glance, "but I should not like to lose time if eleven is old enough! There are so many other things I want to do as well, and I might get that over first. Harry Thomeson's sister is only two years older than me, and she is going to be married. And girls—I mean young ladies—should not be before us men!"

"Dear me," said Augustine, "you have truly patriarchal ideas, my son. Ask mamma what she thinks about it!"

"Mamma thinks George must go and call Betty to supper," said Mary, suddenly putting down the smaller boy, "and she advises him to wait another ten years before he begins to talk about falling in love! It makes mamma feel like a grey old crone to hear of such things!"

"You'll never be old or grey or anything but my beautiful mother!" cried George, darting out from behind Augustine's

chair, and throwing his arms round Mary in a passion of protest.

Mary glanced down into her boy's shining eyes. His devotion made her forget her anxiety for an instant.

Then Augustine spoke. "Yes, my son, you mother will always be beautiful. And I must look to you to keep her free from all ageing, care, and sorrow."

George threw up his head. "I will try, sir," he said.

But above the fair head husband and wife looked at each other, brave, silent, heart-broken souls, each knowing that the other knew.

Betty came dancing back with the other children, and the talk at supper was no less happy than usual. Augustine smiled at the portentous appetites of the young ones, but let them tell all their little adventures without comment. When at last they all trooped off to bed, he and Mary sat silent before the fire, he staring into it as if it could answer some question, she, watching him furtively while her work lay idle on her lap. At last he turned to her with his old bright smile.

"Put that away, Molly," he said, "and come closer to me." She obeyed and came to his side. "Kneel down, love," he said, "I want to look into your face." Then, as she knelt by the chair, her hands clasped on his arm, he looked long and earnestly into her eyes.

"I wanted to ask you to be very brave," he said, huskily, "but there is no need to ask. I can trust you, dear heart!"

"Yes," she said, choking down her emotion, "you can trust me." Then her face was bowed against his hand, and he felt one or two scalding tears creep down upon his fingers.

The next day was unusually cold for the time of the year, and Augustine stayed indoors. Towards the evening Hector McClean rode up to the house and asked to see him. Mary was busy in some distant room, and the young man was admitted to the parlour. Augustine held out his hand and greeted him kindly.

"How is all at Cray, Hector?" he asked. He constantly met the brothers in his goings and comings among his scattered properties, and had done them many a kindly turn. He liked them both, recognizing them for honest men of upright purpose and gentle blood. Hector appealed to him especially, and he was always glad to see the young Highlander, although, in deference to Mary's feelings, he seldom invited him to the house.

Four or five years of growing prosperity in the fine American

climate, the kindness shown now by the other landowners to these new settlers, the broad sunshine of the life, after early years spent in the grim, ascetic atmosphere of his native country—all these things had helped Hector to grow into a strong, genial young man, still speaking his English with most pronounced Scottish accent, but thinking his thoughts on good colonial lines, of which his Virginian neighbours could not but approve. His passion for sport appealed to them too, for Hector never missed a day's hunting if he could help it, and had already shown some fine horseflesh at the races in Fredericksburg.

"How are ye, Mr. Washington?" he inquired, shaking Augustine's hand with eager cordiality. "Eh, sir, but you're no looking well. We were all more than sorry when ye gave up the hounds to Mr. Carter—not but what he knows his business, but Madam Carter seems to think the hounds need tracking theirs, and is no content till she's on 'em or in front of 'em! 'Twas but yesterday she rode over your good Sweetlips, and the puir beast went home over a saddle, Mr. Carter swearing fearful!"

"Sally's never killed old Sweetlips?" cried Augustine. "Why, Sweetlips is the mother of half the pack—the deepest-throated, best-hearted beauty that ever followed a cold scent for half a day and cornered her fox at the end of it!"

"Oh, I'm no saying she's killed," returned Hector, soothingly, "no, no, 'tis not so bad as that! Just a broken rib and a crushed foot! She'll be running again by the time you come out, Mr. Washington. We want you sadly, sir, and'll be mighty glad to have you back among us."

"That won't be this year—nor next," said Augustine, quietly.

Hector leaned forward in his seat, and spoke earnestly. "I do trust it will, though, and that soon," he said. "Oh, sir, I've been thinking—Ian and me, we couldn't forgie oursel's an' 't were that unlucky thrust that had done the mischief! We shouting for joy, too! And the friend you've been to us since! You look bad, sir, and you've no been the same syne the day. We've seen it fine, and 'tis a dour grief to us, I can tell you!"

"No, Hector," said Augustine, slowly "get that out of your head, my lad. It is but a kind of cold, or low fever, I know not what—but none of your brother's doing, at all events. So put it out of your mind. How goes the family? Have you shipped much tobacco to London?"

"Ay," said Hector, "some thirty thousand pounds, of the last crop. He's the proud man, is Ian! He writes to the McClean that 'tis full time he should come out and look on his own property!"

Augustine was silent for a moment. "It is all his, then?" he asked at last, in a low, constrained voice.

"All his," repeated Hector, and then went on with enthusiastic loyalty. "Eh, but he's a great, fine man, the chief! 'Tis his land, and his money, and we are but baileys to him, but of all we send him he sends back half, and bids us take good women to our wives and beget some honester posterity than there's room for in the old country. And 'tis the more generous since now another son hath been born to him, who shall by rights be master of it all. He lost the first, ye ken! And we went grieving there should be no son of the McClean to follow his father. Ah, when he comes, he'll be fain o' the fine land, and glad to keep it for the bairn. Ah, but you're ill, Mr. Washington! Will I be calling some one to ye?"

For Augustine's face had twitched with sudden pain, and all the colour had left it. The young man's honest, unthinking talk had hurt him keenly. In these days he wanted to be at peace with all men, and Hector's words reminded him how hard it was to compass it. Yet he wished, now that the opportunity had come, to ask a question about the only being in the world towards whom he felt a rancour. So he replied, with as much unconcern as he could muster.

"It is nothing—no, do not call any one. Will you pour me out a glass of brandy? the day is very chill!"

Hector rose quickly, and brought a glass and decanter from a side table.

"Thank you, lad," said Augustine, and he drank the spirit gladly. It eased the horrible sense of breathlessness which sometimes went near to choke him. Setting down the glass, and looking away from Hector, he put this question—

"Has—has your cousin been long married?"

Hector did not answer at once. After a moment he said cautiously—

"It all depends on what you call long, sir." He had all the reticence of his countrymen as to their private affairs, and the chief's were more sacred to him than his own.

"Some years, I suppose?" Augustine went on. He felt that there were facts in the old story that had never been accounted for, and Joseph's unquestioning acceptance of them had amazed Augustine, the clear-sighted man of the world. He was resolved now to know more, even at the risk of appearing indiscreet.

Seeing Hector's hesitation, he spoke again. "It is not from mere curiosity that I ask," he said. "You know, I have a great

regard for you and your brother, Hector, and I would be obliged if you would answer me frankly."

"Then I will," said Hector. "You have been such a good friend to us, sir, that I will not even ask you why you wish to know. My honoured kinsman and chief," he threw up his head proudly as he spoke of Robin, "did in his youth set his mind on marrying a certain lady, the daughter of Fraser of Culduthel. That gentleman, misknowing his own best interests, and careless of the great honour offered to him by the McClean, does despitefully bestow his daughter on an enemy of our house, one MacDonald, the lass having seen neither of the suitors till her wedding-day. This fixed, in most insolent open fashion, they take her to church. The McClean, acting as every gentleman would, in such case, calls up some four hundred of his clansmen, and sets out to stop the marriage; but owing to a guard of the MacDonalds treacherously set in a pass of the hills, which guard it took some few minutes to kill, they being two score or so, he arrives at the church door when the troth is plighted and the bridal bound for home and wassail. There's a bit of sword-play, a cry or two, and awa' comes Robin with the lady Jean on his saddle, skirling and scratching, they say, and four hundred McCleans to the back of him to see she doesna fall off. The MacDonald prudently stays behind to quarrel with his father-in-law, swearing Culduthel was privy to the seizure. 'Twas neither father nor bridegroom would come asking for the lady in Duart! But there she bode, and neither priest nor minister would marry her to Robin till the MacDonald was deceased. The chiel had not the small decency to die till some few years syne, when the chief married my lady with book and ring, and was rewarded for his piety by the birth of an heir in wedlock, this time, which the first puir bairn was not, though no ways by his father's fault. There, Mr. Washington, I've told you a bit of family history—most of it happening long before I kent sword from distaff, but none of it what I or any other man of our kin need be ashamed of."

"Perhaps not, Hector," said Augustine, musing on the strange tale which threw light on some hitherto inexplicable events in the past. "Anyway, I am very deeply obliged to you for your confidence. You'll be staying to supper with us, lad?" he added kindly, as Hector rose to go.

"I thank you, sir," said the young man, "but I'll not stop to supper the night. There's much doing, and Ian is his lane, now that Hamish and Sandy are down to Norfolk buying more slaves. Their wives are coming, and two or three more of our men from

Duart! We'll be making a good highland nation in your Virginia soon!" and he laughed heartily.

"I am very glad to hear it," said Augustine. "We could not have better men! Commend me to your brother, since you will not pleasure us by staying longer."

Hector made his farewells and reached the door. Then he turned back and came to Augustine's side once more.

"Mr. Washington," he said, hurriedly, "there's one thing I've often wanted to say, and I'll e'en say it now. If ever there's anything small or great that I can do for you and yours—will you just count it done? I'd be glad to serve you."

Almost before Augustine could return his warm hand-clasp he was gone.

Augustine sat silent, thinking over many things. "I am glad I made him tell me," he said to himself at last. "'Tis all bad, murderous bad—but it does in a way exonerate McClean from the worse of the imputations. Mary would not think so—the women cannot understand—but it does. I would have been loth to go without trying to forgive the man. That was impossible before, but now—is that you, Mary?" he said aloud, as Mary entered the room. "Did you hear that Sally had ridden over poor old Sweetlips? You must send for the young woman and let me lecture her as she deserves."

CHAPTER IV

GEORGE was standing on the top step of the porch, in the pale spring sunshine. The day was clear and balmy, and everywhere the early flowers were making haste to fill the garden beds which the winter had left empty. On one side the land rose up to the kindly fir trees, the constant friends who clothed the hill with a warm yet sombre mantle, grateful to the eye when winter had left ash and birch and maple shivering and bare, but dark and misty enough now, veiled as they were by the screen of fresh verdure spreading through the woods. Beyond the narrow field that boarded the garden, ran the Rappahannock, dimpling and flashing in the sunlight, and bearing on its bosom a few slow sails of vessels leaving Fredericksburg with the turn of the outgoing tide.

George looked across to the little town, which was the city of his world, the only city he had ever seen.

"I do wish they would build a bridge," he said thoughtfully; "there must be some fine schoolmasters yonder. But I suppose a bridge would stop the ships. We should have to place it higher up, beyond the town, where the river narrows." And he glanced along the curving banks, marking the spot that seemed most favourable for the desired undertaking.

"If there were a bridge," said Betty, who was leaning against a pillar of the verandah, and pulling at the interlacing twigs of a young creeper, "I'd be using it for something better than looking for schoolmasters. I'd cross it every morning and stay over there all day, buying the ribbons and comfits in Miss Dartry's shop. And then, only think of the races and the dances! La, I wouldn't be much in Pine Grove, George."

"You are only a girl," said George, with much disapproval. "You cannot understand. When I see the other boys at Master Hobby's going on so fast, and leaving me behind, I think I could swim the river every day, to find a master more to my mind."

"Why, George," cried Betty in amazement, "You are at the top now. What more do you want?"

"If I am at the top 'tis because I have to use my playtime to get there," he said. "The others can do in a minute what it has taken me hours to work out. They seem to cypher without rule or chalk. They must be much cleverer than I, so I ought to have a cleverer master than they! 'Tis but reasonable."

Betty laughed till her little shoulders shook. "You are a blockhead, brother!" she cried. "They cypher without rule, do they? Why, Teddy Mason sits beside you and copies out your answers in his little old spelling-book, and passes it round, and then we all write them down! You work for all the rest, Master George!"

"That is disgracefully dishonourable," exclaimed George, flushing up to his hair. "You girls perhaps do it—it seems to me you would do anything, but I'll not believe it of the boys! Why, they are my friends!" And he squared his shoulders and looked as if he would like to fight it out. Then he remembered that teasing Betty was only a girl, and he turned his back on her.

"Believe anything you like, sir," was her quick reply. "My brothers don't do it—I will say that, and Samuel tried to knock Teddy down when he found it out, only Teddy's so big that it went the other way—but the rest do. As for me, you always used to help me, and I don't see why you shouldn't go on. Only a girl indeed! You are very unkind. Who sewed on the button you pulled off this morning, I'd like to know?"

"I don't mean to be unkind," said George, turning round with a very distressed expression; "but Betty, indeed this must stop. Promise me you'll not copy answers any more. It's like stealing. What would my father think of you?"

"Is it so bad as that?" asked Betty, dubiously. She had really a great respect for her brother's opinion.

"As bad as bad can be," he answered. Then he laid a commanding hand on her shoulder. "Promise, Betty!"

"Very well, I promise," she said with a sigh and a despairing pout on her pretty mouth, "but there'll be a whole regiment in dunce's caps on Monday, and me at the top of the row. Master Hobby'll have a fit, and we'll all get a holiday," she added, her smiles reappearing.

"What are you two wrangling about," asked Mr. Washington, suddenly coming out of the hall door, and standing for a moment, looking at his son and daughter. They were a comely pair, straight, tall, blue-eyed children, with a certain ancestral haughtiness

of air and feature that said much for the past and future of the Washington family. George wore his blue, silver-laced coat with a kind of martial ease, his strong young limbs, enclosed in knee-breeches and white silk stockings, were clean run as those of a fine colt; his fair hair was curled round his face, and was drawn into a *queue* behind, and this morning there was a dash of powder on it. Also he had a little sword at his side, on which his left hand, emerging from a deep lace ruffle, rested lovingly. Betty, too, was dressed for an outing, in blue satin quilted skirt, dainty flowered gown, draped high at the sides, and high-heeled shoes whose paste buckles were sparkling in the sunshine. Her hair, darker than her brother's, was raised to the top of her head, where a knot of pink ribbon and a rose were tied into the curls and held them in place.

"Mighty fine, upon my word," said Augustine, smiling at the young folk, "and what assembly are Miss Elizabeth and Master George about to honour with their presence?"

"Why, don't you remember, papa?" said Betty, opening her eyes in amazement that any one could forget such a fact, "We are going to the christening!"

"Oh, of course," replied her father. "Be sure to bring home some christening cake, and tell cousin Thornton how sorry I am not to see the baby."

One of Mildred's daughters had just made her a grandmother.

"Are you not coming, sir?" asked George, stepping to his father's side, and looking up at him anxiously.

"No, my boy," replied Augustine, "I shall stay by the fire to-day." He shivered as if feeling the cold. "Mamma will take you, and I will hear all about it when you come home." He did not explain that only at his urgent desire had Mary consented to be absent from him for a few hours. He had felt better during the last few days, and showed so much discouragement when she retarded the wheels of life for his sake, that she thought it best to give way.

"May I stay with you, sir?" asked George, adding politely, "I should enjoy it vastly more than the christening."

"George!" gasped Betty, feeling that the world was turning round with her. The children had been looking forward to this treat for weeks past.

"Pray let me stay, sir!" pleaded her brother, taking no notice of her exclamation.

Augustine wavered. It would be pleasant to have his bright, loving boy with him, but he hesitated at accepting the sacrifice.

Then Mary came out and joined them, resplendent in her stiff, flowered-velvet and pearl-looped laces, these half covered by the great furred cloak, which fell away from her fair throat and pale, beautiful face. The inner fear at her heart had robbed her of her sweet colour, but the light was there still, its pallid radiance more lovely than the rosy flush of long ago.

She understood the situation at a glance, and smiled to her boy, whose heart was speaking in his words.

"Let him stay with you, dearest," she said, laying a hand on George's shoulder. "It will be a happiness to him, and to you."

So when Mary drove off in state, with Betty sitting proudly at her side, and the other children, solemn with the sense of best clothes and a great event, on the seat opposite, the father and son were left together.

"You are a good boy, George," said Augustine. "Come in, and we will have a talk by the fire."

Then George felt as if he had already reached his majority.

He followed his father into the parlour, drew up his chair for him, and waited till Augustine was seated before he spoke. His heart was beating with joy. Now, indeed, he would have time to talk out all that he had been storing up there, with no interruptions from importunate brothers and sisters. He realized at once that here was an opportunity which might not occur for months again. Mamma was apt to intervene lately, to stop prolonged conversation.

"If you please, sir," he began, standing up very straight, with his hands behind his back, "may I make the talk first? I am so afraid of not having time to say it all unless I do."

"Why, George," remonstrated Augustine, "you know I am always glad to listen to anything you wish to say to me. You speak as if you had not seen me for months!"

"Well," said the boy, "that is how I feel. Of course, sir," he made haste to add, "that must be my fault. I am always so busy with lessons or something, when I get home. And then mamma——" He paused, fearing he might be betraying a confidence.

"Yes," replied Augustine, "and what about mamma?"

"I think," said George, "she fears you may be tired with our chatter. You are very often tired, I am afraid, sir?" And he looked at his father inquiringly. Such a condition was one which called for deep sympathy, but could not command comprehension.

"Sometimes—a little," returned Augustine, "but not to-day,

son. So let us have it all, and I will answer to the best of my ability. Come and sit on the arm of my chair.

George perched himself on the spot indicated, and then slipped off again. "I cannot see your face so well there," he said. "I like to see what you think, and it will save you some of the talking." And he planted himself squarely on the rug and reflected for a moment.

Augustine let him take his time. He knew how carefully the boy sought to place a fact before himself ere undertaking to impart it to others.

"It is first about the school," said George. "I *think* I am too dull for Master Hobby. I should like to have a cleverer teacher."

"That sounds as if you thought him dull, rather than yourself," said Augustine, a little puzzled at this sudden announcement.

"He is perhaps a little dull, although he knows so much," replied the boy, "and that is why I do not get on better. The tougher the rood, the sharper should be the axe, sir."

Augustine glanced up quickly, struck by the penetration shown in the remark. But he answered quietly, "Yes, George, I quite understand. We will speak of that anon. But now tell me, why do you feel yourself to be dull? I have excellent good reports of you from that same pedagogue."

"He is too easy satisfied," said George, unable to repress a slight tone of scorn. "As long as he getteth an answer, he cares not whether it be a wild guess at some unreasoning, remembered words, or words telling that one has reached the answer by honest knowing or remembering of the reason thereof. Oh, my dear father," he burst out suddenly, "it is too maddening tantalizing to be shown the outside of the axiom or the problem—to be bid to remember its gravel lines or letters, and to forego all explaining of the reason of it. I know I speak badly; there are words somewhere, which would tell you so well what I mean, and I cannot find them, but perhaps you will understand. It does help to talk to you. Didn't you feel it, sir, that kind of rage at being cheated, when they said, A being equal to B, C is equal to both? Why should it be? And when I sit down to think why, the master is angry, and says, 'Get on with your task, Mr. George!' as if the task lay in making certain marks on paper without any reason for their being there."

"You have struck on a great problem, my son," Augustine said; "these signs and marks are arbitrary, and we must accept them as meaning that for which we are told they stand. There is much in life like that, you know."

"But why should I not comprehend what was in the mind of the first man who made them?" asked George, all on fire with the passion for thoroughness which is the strength and the torment of certain powerful temperaments. "The other day Master Hobby said—as if everybody knew what he'd be talking of—'You can't do that'—I forget what it was—'any more than you can square the circle.' Then Betty called out, 'But I can square the circle, sir.' 'Try,' says he, laughing quite scornful. Then Betty whips off her garter and throws it down on her desk in a round first, and afterwards pulls it out squarely with her fingers. 'There,' says she, 'I knew I could do it.' Of course we all knew that that was not what he meant. And Master Hobby says, 'You've not done it, Miss Washington, and the wisest man living can't do it!' So after school I go to him and ask him what he meant. 'Just what I said,' says he, getting cross, and when I ask him why 'tis impossible, he laughs, laughs, sir, over something he confesses to ignorance of. 'I don't know, and I've no time to waste over your silly questions, sir,' he says, 'and there's an end on't!' That's not the schoolmaster for me, father!"

George's cheeks were crimson, and his eyes flashing when he had delivered himself of this oration.

"No," said Augustine, "he is not." Then he was silent for a moment, trying to remember if his own boyhood had ever snatched out at unattainable knowledge. He recollected nothing of this kind. A few unwilling hours in school, a glad escape therefrom, and never another thought of the hated tasks till their hour came round again. This boy of his was an exception, a portent. The lad must be helped. Oh, if Heaven would leave them together yet a few years!

George was looking at him, waiting for his oracle to speak.

"Why have you never told me of all this before?" asked Augustine; "I am sorry I did not know. We could have made other arrangements for you, dear boy."

"I wanted to be sure," George replied; "it is the same in everything. I waited till I was certain he knew nothing of why water rises alone, why the compass turns to the north, how far from a river-bank the first span of a bridge may rest. Oh, there are a thousand things I must know, and I have lost so much time already!"

"You would lose more if you attempted to learn everything at once, my son," said Augustine. "In this life each man hath his job or trade, and the tools necessary to another are useless to him. But it is true that until he has fixed on it, he can scarce

afford to use knowledge of several. This thing we call schooling is an imperfect engine, I confess, and the most industrious teacher must consent to throwing away some part of his pains, even as the indifferent one may console himself by reflecting that, if there were points forgotten in the instruction he attempted to impart, they may have been such as would have found no response in the mind of his scholar. Dost follow me, son; or am I discoursing of things that are too hard for thee?"

"I think I understand, sir," said George, with eyes full of the most earnest interest. "'Tis like teaching fighting and divinity to the one same man, without getting a word from him of whether he will be soldier or preacher. If they asked him, he might have something to say, but the man would rather learn both than neither, until he be given leave to speak."

Augustine mused a moment. He looked at the boy's firm, yet eager face, and risked a qualified question. "You are very young for such choice yet, George, but an' you were given leave to speak, what would you wish to be?"

"Soldier, sir," replied George, without an instant's hesitation.

"Why?" asked his father. "There must be something more reasoning than the mere love of braying trumpets and jingling spurs, to make a man fit for that trade."

"'Tis a man's trade," said the boy; "all the others can be done in petticoats, it seems to me."

"What!" retorted his father, laughing a little; "preaching and lawyering, buying and selling, governing, teaching, would you leave them all to the ladies, George?"

"Why not?" the boy answered; "I suppose it sounds ridiculous, but really and truly, sir, is there one of those things that my mother would not do, if she had to? Did she not show Mr. Mercer the bad point in that case he was beaten about? She told him before it went into court that the judge would fix on that point, and give sentence against him, and he is a lawyer! When she doth teach, she knoweth the matter so well, you can never forget what she hath said; in buying and selling I have heard you say she never makes a mistake in the traffic in horses, or tobacco, or kitchen-stuffs. As for governing, I know nothing about the State. Master Hobby has left that out; but there isn't one here, from me down to my servant Billy, who would disobey her, and not run away afterwards. And her sermons are much better than Mr. Marye's and not half so long."

"You ought to be a lawyer," said Augustine; "you have destroyed the case for the prosecution without neglecting a single

clause. Well done, young man! Now tell me why your mother should not make a brave soldier, too?"

"She would always be brave, but she'd never be a good soldier," replied George. "She is ever for peace, and a soldier must like fighting. I like it."

"You have never tried," was the answer; "it is impossible for you to say until you have."

"Then where do the soldiers come from?" asked George, quickly. "How can they tell, except by wanting it, dreaming of it at night, reading what is written of the great fighters, trying to think how they felt when they were conquering—or being conquered? Oh, father, when you gave me my little sword, my beautiful little sword this morning, you said I was never to use it, but in a manner befitting a gentleman. But what gentleman can find a good quarrel for his sword between the walls of his house? Oh pray, pray sir, let me be a soldier!"

Augustine made no answer for a minute. He was deeply interested in this unfolding of his son's mind, an unfolding as unexpected as it was complete. A terrible lassitude was coming over him, but he fought it down, and gathered all he had of strength to respond to the call on his understanding and sympathy.

"Have you said anything of this to your mother?" he asked, divided between pride in the boy and fear of grief for his wife.

"No, sir," replied George, "she would not like it, but that does not make it less good. I suppose *ladies* never do like fighting." And he sighed over the one defect in his idol's tastes.

"Tell me something else," said George's father. "If you are only anxious to be a soldier, how is it that you complain of not being taught how to steer a ship or build a bridge? Surely these things have little to do with leading men to battle?"

"I don't know," answered the boy; "perhaps I am mistaken, but I thought if I wanted to take Fredericksburg with my army here in Pine Grove, we should need a bridge. Ought not a soldier to know almost everything? There'd be forts to build, and navies to give orders to, and—and all sorts of things I know nothing about. Won't you have me taught? I'll work so diligently, and learn the other things too, if you wish, sir?"

"Do you feel too old to sit on my knee?" said Augustine, suddenly leaning forward and stretching out his arms.

George, who had been standing before the fire during all this debate, came to his father with a bound, and Augustine drew him very close to him.

"My dear, gallant, little man," he said, "I think you have

truly hit upon the cleanest, finest trade in the world. It taketh more virtue to be a good officer than to preach fine sermons, and there never was a case taken to the lawyers that the soldier could not have settled more quickly and honourably. But boy, the soldier is made at home, or he'll never be such on the battlefield. I have asked you many questions, and now I must ask you one or two more. Will you think well before you answer me?"

"Yes, sir," said George, puckering up his brow, and squaring his shoulders, but never taking his eyes from his father's face.

"Well," went on Mr. Washington, "you have thought of fighting, of glory. There is another side to the question. Suppose after marches and wounds, such stiff, sore wounds, George—after long weeks of starvation and misery, and cold, and wet—that you tried your best and were beaten—not a little beating, but a terrible disheartening, humiliating defeat. Such as your brother Lawrence had to suffer with poor Admiral Vernon at San Lazaro. What would you do?"

George thought a minute over the ugly picture. Then he made a grimace and said, "I think, sir, I would take one good meal from the enemy, he'd owe me that, for the fun he'd had in beating me, and then I'd thank him—and try again. I'd have a better chance, because he'd be less afraid of me after beating me once."

"Right," said his father, "and if you never are beaten, remember the prescription. But a soldier has other difficulties. How about carrying out disastrous bad orders from a superior? Would you obey then?"

"Not if I could help it," laughed the boy.

"And if you couldn't help it?"

"I'd obey, I suppose. But I'd find a cleverer man to serve the next time," replied George.

"And suppose the superior were the King?" pursued Augustine. "Loyalty is a soldier's first duty, and there have been monstrous bad kings, you know."

"But they may be good generals!" persisted the lad.

"I mean bad in every way, a bad man, a bad ruler, a bad general," his father replied. "What would you do then?"

"Make another," said George, quietly.

Augustine gazed at his son in amazement. "Upon my word, I believe you would," he exclaimed. "Shake hands, George!"

This was the first time such honour had been accorded to the boy, and he flushed with pleasure as he grasped the proffered hand.

There was silence for a time. Augustine was exhausted by so much speaking, yet, as he lay back in his chair, he was thinking with extraordinary clearness. He had watched the signs of the times. Living his quiet life of a country magnate, he had not lost sight of public events. A kind of regret came over him that he had not taken more active part in them. Life was slipping from him, and though it had brought him happiness and content, home love and friends' respect, he realized with great sharpness that as he had set out on it without ambitions, so he was leaving it without glory. This boy, avid for action, for difficulties, for success, was already greater than he.

George was so accustomed to self-restraint in family intercourse that he did not venture to disturb his father's reverie, although he was burning with eagerness to hear the answer to his request. He moved away to the window, and began polishing and fondling the little sword, which had been promised for his birthday, but had only just arrived from England, and had been given him on this day, that he might have the pride of wearing it at the family assembly in Fredericksburg. It was no toy, but the symbol of an honour which he was now old enough to take into his own keeping.

Mary had shuddered when George came to show it to her, but had conquered herself enough to say a few loving words, to remind him that the gift was evidence of deep trust reposed in him, and that it set him quite apart from all childish quarrels and disagreements. She ended by asking him to promise that the other boys should not be allowed to touch it, adding wisely that "sword honour" forbade its ever being used as a plaything. He thanked her seriously for telling him this rule, and gave his word, and she knew that he would never break it.

Augustine turned and watched him for a moment, marking the reverence with which he handled the beautiful weapon. Then he called him back to him. "My son," he said, looking up into the brave, fair face, when George stood beside his chair, "you and I have been talking of things which might have been left to bide for two or three years yet. But, since life is uncertain, it is well that we have spoken of them now. I want you to remember all I say to-day—especially to remember it if I should leave you before you come to man's estate."

"But you will not?" exclaimed the boy. "Oh, please, sir, never leave us! Why should you?"

"God knows," said Augustine bitterly, "but if I do, and, dear child, I fear I may have to do so—many things will come

upon you that you cannot dream of to-day. If I live, I will help you to carry out your wish; if I die, you may always remember that it had my sanction."

"Oh, father, thank you!" cried George.

"Wait a minute—I must qualify it," said his father, smiling at his eagerness. "I would have you learn all that goes to making a brave and able officer. Yes, your bridge-building, surveying, cyphering—it would all be of vast value to you, were you called upon to act in that capacity. I will find you a better teacher soon. George, we are reared in a monstrous huge continent, stretching far away beyond our ken, rich and fair, and desired by men of other nations, but marked ours by the Providence that set us here. Others will try to rob us—beyond the Blue Ridge the French may be creeping towards the Ohio—you know where that is. The Indians never rest, and are terrible foes at our very doors. We have enemies nearer home, they that should be our brothers—being of our own blood—envy us every advantage, and would rob us of all fruits of our labours, of all independence, of all freedom. I have done a little in my life to help Virginia—which is America—but I have done very little. I want my son to count this country as his first and last and dearest mistress. Also I wish him to know that if she asketh, he must give—give toil and strength, fighting arm and thinking brain, years of life, life itself—he must grudge nothing, nothing, mind, George! The time is coming when she will need help, and the men who help her must be soldiers, legislators, rulers, all in one. We are very few, and our foes are many, though your home looks so peaceful to-day. Have patience, despise nothing, learn, think—above all things, think! Be humble in your own conceit, weigh your adversary's right as well as your own. Never engage in an unjust cause, never abandon a just one, however desperate things do appear to be. Talk little to your mother of your hopes—to other women, never. To your mother the thought of such things would cause grief, though your right acting in them would fill her with noble pride. Apart from her, never ask or take the opinion of a woman, of a minister of religion, or of a sick man upon a public question. No, I have not strength to tell you why—but remember! Oh, my God!" he cried bitterly. "Why must I say all this to a child of eleven years old? Who shall remind the man of the father's words to the boy?"

George was pale with strong yet unexplained emotion. "There will be no need to remind me, sir," he said. Then, as Augustine sank back in his chair, white and spent, he went silently and

etched a glass of the restorative which was always kept ready for these moments of weakness.

"Thank you, dear boy," said Augustine, as he gave back the glass. "You have been always a joy and comfort to me. Be the same to your poor mother."

"That I will," replied George stoutly; "but she's not poor, sir! Why do you say that?"

"'Tis but a way of speaking—and a silly way too!" was Augustine's answer.

The serious talk was ended. Augustine made George bring one of his favourite books and read to him for a while. Then the two had dinner together in state. Old William's son, Billy the elder, standing behind Mr. Washington's chair, and little Billy, in scarlet livery, behind that of his owner, Master George. Augustine spoke little, leaving the talk to the boy, whose tongue was loosed to-day on many subjects which he was too shy to bring forward before a large family party. After dinner they made a visit to the stables, always a favourite spot with them both. As they passed the empty kennels a little sadness fell on them, for the hounds had been much loved, and George wondered audibly whether his old pets were as happy at Fratchett as they had been at Pine Grove.

"We'll bring them back by-and-by, sir!" he said. "In four or five years I shall be able to hunt them myself—and I'll have no ladies in the field to ride over the poor beauties!"

Then Augustine went indoors to rest, and George paced the garden walks with a thoughtful face, pondering on all that his father had said and rejoicing silently over Augustine's sympathy with his hopes, so long nursed in secret that it seemed wonderfully good to find a supporter in the head of the family.

Altogether it was a happy day, and when, towards evening, Mary came back from Fredericksburg with the other children, the latter full of all they had seen, and pitying George for having missed it, he listened with an air of fine indulgent patronage, which seemed to imply that such childish amusements were all very well for his juniors, but no longer worthy the attention of such a grown-up man as himself.

Mary brought back in the big coach a guest whom Augustine was always glad to see, kind Colonel Arbuthnot, a delightful companion and heart-whole friend. He was openly and chivalrously in love with beautiful Mrs. Washington, whose praises he never tired of sounding wherever he went; and what man could do to save her husband for her, the colonel had done. He felt

that the case was beyond his own rough-and-ready skill, and he had brought the leading physicians from Baltimore and Williamsburg and Norfolk (always as friends of his own in need of hospitality on their journeys) to visit and prescribe for the sick man. For himself he reserved the task of amusing and cheering the patient, and very well he succeeded in it.

During the drive home to-day, Mary had been telling the colonel how much better Augustine had seemed for the last day or two. She was so happy over the momentary improvement that she had consented to let some of the friends and relations come to Pine Grove the next day, to stay the night. Ned Carter had many things to tell and advice to ask, for he was becoming a studious farmer of his good land, to Augustine's great satisfaction. Sally must come too, and the young Masons, as Charlie and Eliza were called to distinguish them from the heads of their family. Lawrence, who had been serving under Admiral Vernon in the expedition to Cartagena, had now returned and was living on the Washington Manor estate, which he had named Mount Vernon. He had written to announce himself for a two or three weeks' visit to his father. And of course Colonel Arbuthnot must join the party. Did he think the little excitement would be bad for Augustine? Had his wife been rash in collecting a few friends round him at this Christmas time of family reunion?

Colonel Arbuthnot declared that Madam Washington had done monstrous wisely, as she always did. This was said with a bow and a smile to the sweet, anxious woman, as they drove along through the frosty air. Her face was turned to him with a little eager movement that made her hood fall back, and showed the faint flush of hope in her cheeks, the beseeching desire of encouragement in her eyes. And Arbuthnot, who was no way sentimental, could not help envying the man who was the object of such crystal, faithful love, and found himself pitying him too. "Fancy being adored by this peerless woman, and having to leave her! Poor fellow, poor Augustine!" he thought; and all the while he was telling Mary that it would be the finest thing in the world for her husband to have a little amusement, and that if he did not talk too much, no harm could possibly come of it.

Augustine's face lighted up as they all entered together. Mary threw her cloak on a chair, and came and stood beside her husband, looking down at him with joyful, yet silent greeting. Then she left the men together for a while, and went to have a look at the youngest lamb, who had been left behind that morning.

"You are looking grand, my friend," said the colonel. "I

sometimes have hopes that you are only a successful fraud, imposing on our affectionate sympathy!"

"I wish I were!" returned Augustine. "But indeed I feel better lately—'tis but a kind of breathlessness that prevents me from moving about much. I am glad you came over—I would talk with you about one or two things, old friend. You will stay the night, I hope?"

"No!" said the other, "I am due in Fredericksburg to-night. Oh, I will ride, an' you'll lend me a nag, and not make a long journey of it neither! But I'll come back to-morrow if you will have me. Mrs. Washington tells me that she hath convened something of a family gathering to honour your Lawrence's arrival, and I would crave permission to bring a friend of mine, if it be not trespassing on your hospitality!"

"Bring twenty!" replied Augustine. "All friends of such a friend will find warm friends here! May I learn the man's name?"

"Captain Satterthwaite he is called in England," replied Arbuthnot, "but in these parts he carries the rank of major, to which he would have attained but that the Regiment of Guards to which he does belong admits not the intermediate title. A senior captain, however, takes that rank when mixing with officers from other regiments, therefore, Satterthwaite is commanded to carry it here. I have known him many years and have received no small kindness from him. I could return him none greater than by making him acquainted with you and Madam Washington. He may alarm her a little at first, however."

"Tell me about him," Augustine replied.

"Well," said the other, "that is not so easy to do, but I will try. 'Tis a strange, grim, lovely, soldier-body—now don't laugh, the words do fit him! He hath fought in all countries, known most men, terrified many, I should guess, and shown them such a gentle heart under his strange exterior that they must have loved him in spite of it. Nay, there is one story will tell you all the man. Do you remember the tale of a three days' siege of a city called Prague? The tale ended with the death of a young prince—the only son of his mother? 'Twas some five years since; you may have forgotten; very few have heard it truly told. I learnt the same truth by an accident, having often wondered where lay the key to its incomprehensible conclusion! 'Tis a confidence, Augustine."

"A confidence, friend," replied Augustine, "I understand. Now tell me."

Arbuthnot drew his chair nearer, and spoke in a low voice. Augustine bent his head to listen. At the end he raised his eyes and gazed at the narrator in a kind of appalled admiration.

"Yes," said Colonel Arbuthnot, "he shot the poor coward boy himself!"

"Good God!" exclaimed the other. "Is that the manner of man he is? Bring him, bring him—I'd be honoured by his presence in my house."

CHAPTER V

A VERY cheerful party assembled at Pine Grove the next day. It was long since hall and parlour had been crowded with pretty faces and gay costumes, long since they had rung with so much talk and laughter. Augustine, in his great elbow-chair, was the centre of the circle of guests, whose contagious gaiety almost made him share their scepticism as to his own condition. It was easy to believe in life and health with all these happy faces, these whole, strong people around him; he felt better than he had done for many months; and Lawrence, who had not seen him for some time, could not believe that his father was in any danger. He rallied Mary playfully on having written him alarmist reports—he and Colonel Arbuthnot were the only persons to whom she had confided her fears and anxieties. And as Mary, talking in a corner with Lawrence, turned and looked at her husband, marked his bright eyes and returning colour, as she heard his laugh ring out in the old, happy fashion at some joke from Ned, she felt hope born anew in her, and put sorrow away from her for the time. The return, temporary though it might be, to the social cheer which she had enjoyed in the early days of her marriage, was delightful and reviving to a spirit accustomed so long to contemplate far graver issues. As she put out both hands in a sudden movement of grateful joy to Lawrence for his encouraging words, the years seemed to fall away from her face like a veil withdrawn. Its tender gravity was lighted by one of her old radiant smiles, the sweet colour mantled in her cheeks, and the blue of her eyes had the smile of the morning in its depths instead of the shadow that had lurked there of late.

Augustine had asked her to put on once more her wedding-dress, the white watered silk with its brocade of roses and ribbons, its heavy train and painted bodice hung with pearls and lace.

"I shall look like a fright, my dearest," she said, laughing, "and 't will sure not meet across the bosom, for I have monstrous

broad shoulders now ! But since it pleaseth you to see such a commanding matron masquerading in the dress that was all too easy for the slim maid, why pleased you shall be, sir." So she put on her wedding-gown, and with it some called-back radiance of the fleeting, tender time, a radiance that touched her full-grown beauty with transcendent loveliness.

Lawrence took the two hands in his, and kissed them. "What dear comforters they were to me !" he said, when he looked up. "Why, Madam Mamma, you look as you did when I first saw you ! There's not a girl here can hold a candle to you to-night !"

For it was evening now, and great wax lights burned in silver sconces on wall and table. The many-coloured silks of the women's dresses, the splendid velvet and lace of the men's costumes, a jewel shining here, a sword-knot there, made the great room look like a moving garden whose flowers had kept the dew after the sun had risen to shine upon them. Some one began to play a country dance on the harpsichord, and there was a swaying movement of brilliant figures, a rhythmic tapping of light feet, and then the flowers seemed to part of themselves, the roses on one side where bright brocades stood all arow, the brave carnations and sweet-williams on the other, where were the men in their full bravery of sword and velvet. Between was the empty lane of dark shining floor, giving back a long gleam of light and colour here and there.

The first inspiring bars were struck, then the measure flung out its soft, alluring rhythm, and a thrill seemed to ripple down the two long lines ; the music called and the dancers answered, swaying over across the dividing space, with hands outstretched and movements of entreating charm. The women's heads all turned one way like flowers to the sun, the men leaned far across, reaching out for the slender fingers, then, as the minor of the music changed to a glorious outburst of the air in joyous major chords, the two lines swung together with triumphant grace, hands joined hands raised high, little feet and strong, lithe limbs came dancing down the lane of light, robes floated, jewels flashed, sweet eyes glanced shyly up to bold ones, and in a moment the whole room was a moving tide of lovely, sentient happiness.

Then the air died down to a note of farewell. Without a break of step or motion each couple glided back to its place. The stream parted, once more the two lines formed in all their glowing gleam and colour on either side of the empty polished way, and at the far end of it Mary, who had been standing near a window, spell-bound, to watch the charming sight, beheld the figure of a

gigantic man, in the uniform of a British officer, standing within the open door, looking straight towards her.

He overtopped every man there by the head and shoulders. His face was the shape of a hatchet, darkly blue round the jowl, with a huge, square nose, eyes of the most brilliant blue, overhung by heavy eyebrows, one of which was sheared by a white scar. His coat was less scarlet than crimson, from age and wear; his yellowed leather breeches seemed to clothe an interminable length of leg until the eye took in the great long black boots that met them above the knee. On his breast two decorations, a silver medal and a small iron cross.

Colonel Arbuthnot entered now, and led the war-seared giant down between the lines of silk and velvet, powder and jewels and beautiful faces. A silence was on every one, and all eyes followed the officer as he passed before them in his worn uniform, clutching tight at his heavy scabbard to keep it from clanking hideously. He himself looked like a great sword thrown across a bed of roses. Arbuthnot led him straight to Mary, where she stood in her white brocade before the crimson curtain.

"Madam," said the colonel, with a deep bow, "I have the honour to present to you Major Satterthwaite of His Majesty's regiment of Guards, lately arrived in Virginia to act as Aide-de-camp to His Excellency the Governor."

Then he moved aside, and Mary made a very stately curtsy; the major stepped back, not forward, in order to have room to bow; and when he straightened himself she felt vaguely thankful for having escaped annihilation in the greeting of this towering personage.

"Sir," she said, with something of tremor in her full, sweet voice, "we are glad to welcome you to Virginia. I trust your stay here will be long, and seem as short to you as it doubtless will do to your friends."

"Madam," replied Major Satterthwaite, in a peculiarly gentle and low voice, "my visit has already brought me great happiness in the honour of making your esteemed acquaintance. You have permitted me to be a guest in your house. I can ask no higher distinction or truer pleasure from my stay in this country." There was well-bred sincerity in the words.

"Let me make you known to my husband, sir," was Mary's reply. "This is but a family gathering, and I should make excuses for having permitted the dancing to begin before your desired arrival. But youth and music met and would brook no delay."

She was moving across the room with the tall major by her

side, and the gay groups fell back, with something like consternation, to let them pass. Mrs. Washington glanced up at her companion as she concluded her pretty speech, and was rewarded for it by as kind a smile as she had ever seen on a human countenance.

Augustine had already risen and taken a few steps forward to meet his new guest. The tactful colonel had permitted himself to be caught by a bevy of laughing dames, who took hands and made a ring round him, from which they vowed—in whispers—he should not escape till he had told them all they were expiring to know of his formidable new friend.

So Major Satterthwaite stood alone with his host and hostess. His great fingers, knotty and scarred and burnt of nail, closed round Augustine's smooth, fine hand. Then the major hastened to withdraw his own, and put it behind him under his coat-tail, while the other rested on the hilt of his sword, also well out of sight.

Mary, standing in smiling silence while the first greetings were exchanged, noted these things. She had come to be exceedingly observant of so-called trivialities whenever they could lay claim to being an index of character. "Poor man," she mused, "he is ashamed of those great, rough hands. I wonder where they got so many scars! They look like old flails—and his voice is soft as a child's! What splendid lace in that tie! I wonder if I could get it bleached for him while he is here! 'Tis profanely in want of darning, too. He must be a terrible fierce soldier—but sure he'll never be talking of fighting amongst us! I'll not permit it if I can help it."

And these simple thoughts, chasing each other through her mind while she stood, a mute, gracious presence beside the two men, showed that Mary, for all her grave wisdoms and gallant self-repressions, for all her experience of people and things, had still some very childlike trusts and dreads in the bottom of her heart. Life had but read her half the lesson book, the rest was to come.

Another person was watching the new guest, with absorbed, speechless interest. George, standing at attention beside the chair from which his father had risen, devoured with his eyes every detail of Major Satterthwaite's remarkable appearance and constrained though soldierly deportment. The young heart was beating to bursting with excitement and joy. Here was a man indeed, an adept, a master, at what George had called "a man's trade." The boy became unaware of his own existence. His lips

were moving in silent, unconscious imitation of the major's speech, his fingers bent themselves over his sword-hilt like the major's old engines of war; his right hand slipped round beneath his coat-tail to match the officer's attitude; his own breath seemed to be coming and going under that small black cross. Would the great man ever condescend so far as to tell him its story? What a sun of joy and light had risen on his world in the person of this great dark man in an old red coat!

The boy gasped when his mother moved to his side and laid her hand on his shoulder. Some instinct made her wish to remove her George from Major Satterthwaite's vicinity.

"Go, my son," she said, "and see if everything be ready for the supper. Our guests are all here now, and must be growing hungry. You children shall have your dance when it is over."

"Madam," said George, having found his breath, "will you be so loving kind as to say 'the children' when you speak of them? I am not one any longer. I will go and see about the supper. Shall I return to tell you here?"

He had drawn himself up to his full height, his eyes were shining, but there was a wistful appeal in the curve of his young lips. Mary remembered the day when she threw the leading rein over the hedge. George had come to his commander for promotion again.

"Yes, my son, I will wait for you here," she said, adding with grave courtesy, "pray see if the children's table be fair set in the inner room. *We*," and she smiled into his face, "will sup in the dining-room, as you know, George."

He took his triumph quietly, like the gentleman he was. But he raised her hand to his lips before he went to do her bidding. His mother's eyes followed him with almost wondering pride.

"Hath any other woman such another boy?" she asked herself.

The supper was nearly over, and the younger people, to whom it was less of an object than the dancing, were beginning to look beseechingly at Mrs. Washington for leave to return to the drawing-room. The major, according to the old rule which made the stranger the guest of honour, was seated on Mary's right, while Colonel Arbuthnot occupied the place on her left. But one toast had been proposed—"The King"—and had been met with loyal alacrity. The major drank very sparingly, and said little during the meal. Other tongues were filling the room with talk and laughter, and he seemed satisfied to look on, although doing his

best to respond to Mary's efforts to draw him out. She realized that he was exceedingly shy, but the amused expression on his face satisfied her that he was enjoying himself in his own way. Augustine, looking down the long, crowded table, with its load of fruits and flowers, wines and lights, thought that Mary and her neighbour furnished a striking example of the contrasted attractions and characteristics of man and woman. A few seats away from Major Satterthwaite was George, his attention so taken up by the great man that he remained callous to the whispers and glances of a very lively little girl—the same whom he had reported as being "almost as pretty" as his mother. Lucy was about his own age, and when she found that Master George was to sit at "the grown-up table," had refused the hospitality of Betty and her brothers in the children's room, and had slipped into the chair beside her young admirer—a post whence Mary had not the heart to banish her, even though the young lady's mother reproved her little daughter for her forwardness. Miss Lucy looked beseechingly at kind Mrs. Washington, who had nodded assent to the arrangement, and it was not disturbed.

At any other time George would have been delighted with the attentions showered upon him by the little coquette. She whispered and smiled and pouted; put comfits on his plate; pretended she had hurt her finger with a walnut shell, and wound it up in her lace handkerchief, mamma's disapproving eye upon her all the while; but her blandishments, as well as her complaints, passed unheeded. George had eyes for no one but the major, although at stated intervals he solemnly heaped his little companion's plate with fruit and sweets, thus fulfilling his hospitable duty, as he considered. He had not sat down till the older people were seated, and he had waited eagerly to see what the officer would do with his sword. When he saw the major take it off, buckle the belt, and hang it over one of the uprights of his chair, George copied the action in detail, looked again at his model, noticed that the latter had chosen the left side on which to place his, and promptly altered the position of his own to match it, before he would sit down.

The major noticed the little manoeuvre—the glance towards himself, followed by the rapid shifting of the sword, and was immensely tickled at the incident. From that time he watched the boy with growing interest; he saw Lucy's blandishments neglected; George was always looking at him, although he turned his eyes shyly away whenever they met those of the officer. The latter found himself wondering what Mr. Washington meant to

make of this blue-eyed lad who showed such silent, fixed desire to learn a soldier's ways.

Just then Lucy, giving up the attempt to attract George's attention, made an onslaught on a pink-cheeked apple, and, after the first bite, began to finger the bright sword-hilt which hung close to her shoulder. Then she wanted to draw the blade from the sheath; it hung too high for her, so, taking advantage of the boy's abstraction, she attempted to lift the belt over the knob of the chair, without letting go of the fruit. Then came a clatter, a little scream from Lucy, the sword jingled down on the floor, and the apple rolled away from it.

George was on his feet in an instant. Flushed with anger, he picked up his beloved sword, carefully hung it again on the chair, on the side furthest from Miss Lucy this time; and, only when that was done, went after the apple, which he restored to her with a bow and a countenance denoting extreme displeasure. Major Satterthwaite almost chuckled as he watched the scene. Then he rose slowly to his feet, for Mary was rising, and the young people made a rush for the drawing-room, where the fiddles soon struck up a dance.

"Stay with us awhile, madam," whispered Arbuthnot, "Augustine wants to talk, and he never talks so well as when you are by!"

Mary glanced at Augustine, and he pointed to her chair; so she let the rest troop out, and sank down into her seat again. The dancers could take care of themselves, and she was glad to stay behind. Augustine came to her end of the table; Lawrence had remained, and so had the young lawyer, Mr. Mercer, as well as a few of the older men, intent upon their port, and looking forward to the easy, interesting converse which always comes when the business of the evening is well over. Mrs. Washington's delightful presence was a source of inspiration rather than restraint. George had lingered near the door, and, when the crowd was well out of the room, came and stood beside his father.

As Augustine chose an empty chair opposite Major Satterthwaite, Mary said, under cover of the general move, "You are sure you are not tired, my dearest?"

He answered smiling, and in the same low tone, "Not a bit, Molly! I never felt better in my life."

Then glasses were filled afresh, and Augustine held his up and bowed to the major.

"Sir," he said, "there is a toast which, but for the unseemly haste of those fanatic votaries of Terpsichore, would have been

proposed to the whole company: it must be drunk the more heartily by the few wise companions who remain with us. Here's to His Majesty's Blue Guards!" Then he touched glasses with the major; the other men did the same, and the toast was drunk with all the honours.

When Major Satterthwaite put his glass down he looked at Augustine with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Mr. Washington," he said, "I would fain give thanks, but I perceive one gentleman present who hath not joined in your kind toast. Will not Mr. George also drink to the Blue Guards' prosperity?" And he smiled at the lad, standing so straight and tall beside his father's chair.

"Why, George," said Augustine, "here's honour for you!" and he filled a glass, and put it into his son's hand, while the major refilled his own.

George came round to where the major was standing up waiting for him. He had to hold the glass carefully, for it was full and his hand was trembling, but his head was high and his face very resolute.

The major bent down (he had to bend very far) and held out his glass.

"To the Blue Guards!" cried George, with his heart in the cry.

"Your very good health, Mr. George," said Major Satterthwaite gravely, as the glasses clinked. Poor George could hardly empty his, for the beating of his heart.

"And now, sir," said the major, turning once more to Augustine, "let me thank you, in the name of a hard-worked and sadly traduced regiment, for your kind reception of its least worthy officer. May I venture to propose the health of Mrs. Washington, and—at a proper distance, which signifieth a very long way after her—that of the other ladies?"

Mrs. Washington smiled, and touched her glass to her lips, and as they all sat down again, the major having motioned George into the chair at his side, Colonel Arbuthnot whispered to Augustine—

"Ask him about the war—ask him. He's fresh from Europe."

Now, to tell the truth, war of one kind or another was so chronic in Europe, and news so slow in reaching rich, distant, sleepy Virginia, that Augustine had only the vaguest idea of the particular conflict to which Colonel Arbuthnot might be referring. That a world-stirring question with the incomprehensible title of "The Pragmatic Sanction" was being discussed at the point of the bayonet across the water, was certainly known to Mr. Wash-

ington; but precisely who the combatants were and what they were fighting about were questions in which he had taken but little interest. Of late his own situation and the future of his large family had absorbed all his thoughts; newspapers came but rarely to Pine Grove, and the place was off the track of the amiable and witty gentlemen who lived by visiting different friends all the year round and paid for the hospitality by always bringing the latest gossip in their saddle-bags. However, Augustine did his best not to miss the opening thus afforded.

"You are but just from Europe, sir, I hear," he said, bowing towards the major. "Now pray favour us poor recluses with some of the news."

The major looked round in some alarm. It was as if he had been asked to make a speech on general history, and his mind became a blank at once. Augustine remembered the old signal of his school days, and called Arbuthnot into the breach by a gentle kick at the foot nearest him. The colonel roused himself at once.

"Ay, major," he said, "we are all anxious to know how things are going! We have yet scarce understood whose allies we are, and what all the fighting is about. If 'tis not too monstrous trouble to put you to, won't you enlighten us?"

The major had roused his memory, and laughed gently at his friend's question.

"I wish I knew!" he replied; "and I believe the best-informed persons in Europe would say the same! Of course, the king can do no wrong; but 'tis no treason to say that his majesty, having given no reason that the sensible mind can accept for going into the war, is probably deprived of possessing such! A war is a war for him and for every other brave soldier, and 'twere doubtless poor policy to refuse such a fine piece of diversion, because there is neither a motive for taking it up, nor an ounce of advantage to be derived from carrying it on."

In spite of the covered sarcasm of this speech, Mary considered it too bloodthirsty to pass unchallenged—at any rate in George's presence.

"Surely, sir," she said gravely, "no Christian man could make war for mere pleasure! The bare thought of such a thing is both cruel and horrible."

"Ah, ma'am," said the major, with deference, "even your kind heart cannot comprehend what a horrible thing war is. Yet even for its own sake, and taken up without sufficient cause, it may make more Christians—taking that term to mean honest men who are also brave ones—than uninterrupted peace. For this latter,

in certain peoples naturally fitted for conflict, doth breed a pestilential laziness of good living which is blood-brother to bad living—luxury run mad, dishonesty legislative, corruption of the best, and a sort of bloated triumph of the worst! A conflagration is a terrible thing; but only the Fire of London stayed the Plague!”

“Well pleaded, my friend,” exclaimed Arbuthnot; “and now that the moral is exhibited, tell us what motive was spelt out on the blackboard for the people to read this time? Some such there surely was.”

“Oh, a fine one,” returned Major Satterthwaite, “and the reading of it brought tears to the people’s eyes. Our good monarch explained that the King of England, as a chivalrous knight of distressed beauty, could do no less than hold out a helping hand to the Queen of Hungary, otherwise, and by her lamented father’s will, Austria’s empress, Maria Teresa, whom France and Prussia will but call by the first of her titles, they electing to set up a very incompetent gentleman, Charles the Seventh by name, to manage the rest of her inheritance. But I fear that Madam Washington will find this a tedious, dry discourse?” And the major looked apologetically to Mary.

“Pray go on, sir,” said Mary, who was much interested in his concise account of events but hazily known to her; “there is nothing so pleasing as a true story, and you do tell it well!” She was quite eager for the rest.

“Thus encouraged, I will obey,” he replied. “All this, as I have said, the King of England did say in his own person, and then, like some fine player running off the stage and re-appearing in another dress, hey, presto, the King of England hath disappeared and the Elector of Hanover is pleading with his British subjects to preserve his beloved birthplace, his poor, sweet Hanover, from French and Prussian aggression. Will they let that country, which gave them their king, become the mere appendage of a foreigner? The good British people, forgetting that some rude critics have thus described their own condition at this time, cry, “Never, never! What would become of our poor country should the King of England cease to be the Elector of Hanover as well!” Tears flow, trumpets bray, heart and purse-strings are loosed, and the loyal Commons beg the King’s acceptance of two small presents, the first a little sum of five hundred thousand pounds to be sent, with their best duty, to the pretty distressed lady; the second, a trifle of five million pounds wherewith to bring an army to her assistance. The King graciously accepts both; and then, having no more use for Hanover at the

time, presently announces that he hath withdrawn her from the conflict and sent her among the neutralities, where no harm can come to her. This prudent measure throweth a sudden chill on the poor English, who, dull as they may be, perceive that they are to bear the brunt of the fighting and paying alone. Never mind, the money is given, and not to be had back to their pockets. Discontent speaks out when it is learnt that a part of it shall go to pay fat wages to some sixteen thousand Hanoverians who honourably consent to be engaged as mercenaries by the King of England, who has now replaced the Elector of Hanover. He is so royally tender of these poor strangers that he quarters them in a prosperous grass living town of Holland, there to eat and drink till they be wanted. The town groans, but the Hanoverians feast. At last the King saith, 'Dlump, here's a fine play, and we not in it. I'll out and lead my brave soldiers at the first Frenchman or Prussian I can meet!' Whereupon he starts on his travels, and one morning wakes up in a poor, unknown country, with some twenty-five thousand hungry men at his heels, and neither bite nor sup to give them. We'd been wandering for weeks in strange roads that brought us back to the place we started from. Food got scarcer and scarcer, and for all it was June we were glad to sit round the camp fires at night, burning our very boots off our feet to get the cold of hunger out of us. As we went on we had found that the provisions had been all devoured by the Austrian contingent, upon whom, with their leader, Prince Aremburg, we stumbled in a forlorn little town by a big river, along whose banks we had been marching for two weary, groping, foodless days. By this time the Hanoverians are with us, fat and soft with recent feasting, and cursing fearfully at present privations.

"Where's your provision train?' says Aremburg, when we get into the town. 'Can you not give us a meal? We've had nothing for twenty-four hours!'

"Ate up everything before we came, did you?' growl our leaders. 'We shall have to turn cannibals, then, after all.'

"But your supplies?' says the Austrian. 'Where did you leave them?'

"In England, with the money that paid for 'em,' says we, and that was the truth, I am sorry to say.

"We must get out of this,' says the King, 'and pretty sharp, too! Call me my carriage, and we'll all march back the way we came' (though devil a man in the allied armies knew the name of the road or one of the villages in it). 'Maybe,' says he, "they'll

have grown some crops and bred some cattle since we was there, the day before yesterday—it seems long enough, anyhow !’

“ ‘Oh, sir,’ groan his generals, ‘the men must sleep to-night—the poor fellows can’t set one foot before another ! Here’s a potato and a bottle of beer for your Majesty’s supper !’

“So we drop down in our places, and the poor horses lie down beside us like so many sheep, dreaming of English corn, poor beasts. At the break of day we rise like one man to go and look for breakfast. The King comes out and gets into his carriage, and I have the honour to ride close to it with some other officers. Nobody had thought of looking out to see what was on the further side of the town, nor what might be lying hid among the reeds on the opposite bank of the river. ‘Tis the Main,’ some one says. ‘I wish ’twere beer !’ says another. ‘Any Frenchmen out yonder ?’ I ask. ‘How can they be ; we saw none yesterday !’ I am answered. ‘What’s that clanking in the town we can hear so clearly ?’ says I, looking back to where the last of the infantry are trooping out of the gates. ‘The Devil taking possession again !’ says my comrade, ‘and a good thing, too ! I’ve seen all I want of Aschaffenburg !’ ‘You’re mighty clever to say that long name on an empty stomach,’ says I, and then there’s a cry from the Hanoverians ahead of us, and the word is thrown back with a yell from rank to rank that the French cavalry is charging. At the same moment, from the left bank of the river comes a crash of artillery from a dozen masked batteries full on our flank, and the battle has begun.

“We are in a narrow plain, like a long strip of field, the river on our left, a steep chain of impassable hills on our right, the town, now filled with Frenchmen, who begin firing at us from the walls behind, and the whole French army before. The King is on his feet in an instant, all King for the nonce. ‘Where’s my horse ?’ he roars, and, as it’s dragged up, he’s into the saddle and off to the front, that’s but a few hundred yards away now, the French cavalry charging the Hanoverian foot like demons, and killing those they don’t ride down. Off we fly after him to where his horse, that’s mad with fear at the noise, is carrying him straight at the French. Some one catches his bridle, and we drag him back to where the Austrians are forming, as best they can, in the strangling narrow space between river and hills. The French charge is checked, no one knows why. The King dismounts, and calling us to follow, climbs a hill on the right, full in view of every musket and cannon in the French army. He has a battalion of infantry and the Blue Guards. ‘Sir,’ cries the colonel, ‘for God’s

sake stand back. Let us make a screen before you, at least! 'Tis all he can do to make himself heard through the cannon thunder and the crackle and the snapping of the bullets and the yells of shrieking horses and men. The King is as speechless as he is obstinate. He waves us to one side of him, sends the infantry behind, draws his sword, and holds it straight out from the shoulder pointing at the enemy, while his eyes glare as if they were jumping out of his head. His left hand is glued to his side, like a recruit's at attention. In this attitude he stands for two mortal hours, and keeps us there inactive, under a hail of shot and shell, we cursing him for a madman or a hero—no other could thus stick himself as a target for a whole army! Maybe he meant to distract the enemy's attention from Aremberg's Austrians, who were working steadily after the Hanoverians through a great rabble of French infantry that came pushing past their own cavalry, all in disorder, and only dangerous now from numbers and terror. Many of our men had fallen—poor young Blowick lay dead beside me, his horse nosing him anxiously as he lay on his face. The King did not speak, and we were awaiting certain death from the spluttering cannonade, when this stopped as suddenly as it began. The French could no longer fire without mowing down their own people, so inextricably were the two armies now mixed up. Then at last the King turned his head so as to bring one eye round to our colonel. 'Charge,' says he, and I tell you we were down that hillside like a streak of light, shouting for joy at our deliverance. Charging was play compared to what we had gone through up there! In half an hour the strip of field was cleared. The French—those who could move—tumbled into the river, and tried to swim to the batteries their stupid onslaught had silenced—some got away through the hills, many were slain. 'Twas all some foolishness of young Gramont they say—he would not keep to Noailles' orders. Anyway, when we got back to Dettingen, where there hadn't been a loaf of bread two days before, we made a most excellent meal off the Frenchman's provisions which they had thoughtfully left ready for us. That breakfast closed the campaign."

There was a hum of interest and applause as the major ended his story. He suddenly became shy and silent again, and then was aware that the boy at his side was addressing him.

"If you please, sir," said George, confidentially, "there's Dettingen written on your medal. Did you get it there?"

"The King gave it to me afterwards," replied Major Satterthwaite, "for staying still, I suppose, until I was told to

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move. 'Tis one of the hardest things a poor soldier ever has to do."

"Is it, sir?" said George. "Thank you very much for telling me." And he pondered a moment, with his eyes on his plate. Then he looked up quickly. There was a little buzz of talk going on round them, and the boy found courage to put another question. "Please, sir, will you tell me one thing more? Where did you get your little black cross? I hope it is not too bold of me to be asking you?"

For the major's face had changed, and he looked grave. "You must wait a few years for that, my boy," he said. "I cannot tell you that story now."

The children had all gone upstairs. Mary came out to say good night to George in the hall.

"Mother," he said, when he had kissed her hand, "Major Satterthwaite got his medal for just waiting. Is it harder to wait than to fight?"

"Much harder, George," she replied. "The major must be a very brave man."

As she returned to the drawing-room she paused beside Colonel Arbuthnot, who was having an animated conversation in undertone with Sally Carter.

"But why does he wear such a faded old uniform?" inquired Sally, glancing across the room to where Major Satterthwaite's dark head overtopped a group of which he was the centre. "And his boots are burnt in black ridges across the soles—I saw them when he was sitting down just now! Is he in straitened fortunes?"

The colonel bridled for his friend, and replied quickly: "By no means, madam! He hath a fair private fortune, though 'twere hard to say on whom 'tis spent. 'Tis rumoured that he does maintain the family of some slain comrade. I know not how true that may be, but that carefully brushed old coat is a challenge, as it were, to the detractors who put about the story that the Blue Guards did refuse to go into action last summer at Dettingen, when the King kept them waiting at his side for what appeared to be certain death! D'ye see that darn in the right sleeve? A bullet went through that, Madam Sally! And as for the boots, well, I wish mine were in like condition! 'Twould mean they'd tramped over battlefields and been burnt over German camp fires in the performance of my duty!"

"La!" laughed Sally, "yours are much finer, colonel! Who wants to be reminded of camp fires in a drawing-room?"

CHAPTER VI

IT was the next evening, and all the guests had departed except Colonel Arbuthnot, who had consented to remain, and Major Satterthwaite. Augustine, in spite of a good deal of fatigue after the unwonted excitements of the previous day, had insisted upon their staying one night more. He confided to Arbuthnot that the major interested him, and the colonel thought a little quiet talking could do no harm. Lawrence had ridden over to Fredericksburg, and was not expected to return till late in the evening. When George and the children had gone to bed, Arbuthnot drew Mrs. Washington into the drawing-room on some excuse, and kept her there, saying that the major might find some more stories wherewith to amuse Augustine, and that the latter would make less effort if he had but one companion. Mary consented a little unwillingly to leave the two together. She was more anxious about her husband that day, and also felt silently jealous of losing his society even for an hour, though she refused to acknowledge to herself that there could be any reasonable cause for such a feeling. She sat down and took up some work. The colonel did his best to entertain her, but her attention wandered a good deal.

Meanwhile Augustine sat by the fire in the dining-room, discoursing on many things with the major, who was seated opposite to him, stretching out to the warmth the singed boots at which Mrs. Sally had taken exception the evening before. The house was very quiet, and the great logs on the fire crackled with a pleasant sound.

A little silence had fallen on the two men. Augustine was gazing into the flames, and his visitor, watching him, noticed with keen pity the sunken temples, the bloodless lips, the unnatural brightness of the deep blue eyes, all the signs that told of conquering disease taking possession of a man in the very prime of life. And this man was making a brave fight in a lost cause. Did he know his condition, the major wondered.

"I am glad to have some talk with you, sir," said Augustine, suddenly looking round, "although our acquaintance is of so recent a date. I trust you will excuse me for speaking of my own affairs. I would wish to ask your advice on a very important matter."

"It is at your service, Mr. Washington, if such poor stuff can be of any use to you," replied the other man, in his strangely soft voice, and looking at his host with some surprise.

"It will seem unusual to you, perhaps," Augustine went on, "that a man you have only known twenty-four hours should ask for your counsel; but given that I can put my case clearly, you will be an impartial judge, and that is difficult of attaining for persons deeply interested in the parties. Have you noticed my son George, at all?" And he stopped, a little out of breath, and looked at Satterthwaite questioningly.

"I have indeed," was the hearty response, "a fine, manly lad, with the best of manners. Of course he could have no others," the major made haste to add, modestly fearful of any appearance of patronage.

"It gives me pleasure to hear your opinion of him," Augustine answered. "He is an honest, loving boy, so justly dear to his mother, that I trust he will console her for my loss."

The words were spoken in a simple, matter-of-fact tone, but the major started as he heard them. He had been wondering whether this sick man suspected his danger, and was now shown that he had made friends with it. But the conventionalities demanded a protest.

"I trust you are mistaken, sir," Major Satterthwaite said, and then could say no more, for Augustine was looking at him with an amused smile.

"You refer to the loss, or to the consolation?" he inquired. Then he continued a little testily: "Indeed, sir, I have so little time to lose, that with your permission we will put aside all compliments, and, since my poor wife is not here, take it for granted that I am a dying man. I am anxious to do all I can for my son before leaving him. The others are too young for decisions, but George is very much in earnest, and though his mother is the wisest and best of women, he will go sorely wanting some sane man's judgment of his ambitions, and the paths that shall lead to them. His mother will oppose his dearest wish, which is, to wear the King's uniform."

"All boys wish that, at one time or another," said the major; "tell me about his dispositions. Brave and spirited, I am sure he is, but is he also patient, obedient to superiors, scrupulous in

carrying out commands? I am a poor specimen myself, Mr. Washington, but I do assure you I have a very high regard of what I consider an officer should be."

"So have I," replied Augustine, "and I pray you not to depreciate the merits of one whose friendship I would ask, an' I had the boldness, for my son, in the years to come. Am I asking too much, Major Satterthwaite? I believe the boy will show himself worthy of it."

"I will do what I can for him," said the major, with a sudden kindly lighting up of the eyes. "Mr. Washington, you have all my respect. You are calm and cheerful in the face of a fate harder to meet than any quick death in the open. If your boy is like you he will be a brave man."

Augustine bowed his head in silent and dignified acknowledgment of another brave man's tribute.

"And now," continued the other, "as to his future—tell me more of him. What are his tastes? What have his studies been? The name of soldier covers many things!"

Augustine told him his own opinion of the boy's character and gifts. Of his admirable truthfulness, his courage and modesty, his eager desire to learn things which other boys would have looked upon as the most tedious of tasks. He spoke in short sentences, breaking off when fatigued, then adding some other detail as if fearful that time would not be given in which to do his George justice.

The major listened without interruption, without comment. At last Augustine leaned back in his chair with a sigh. "I have but wearied you with the pratings of parental fondness, I fear," he said. "I should ask your forgiveness, I think."

"I am profoundly interested," said Major Satterthwaite, "and most sensible of the honour of your confidence, Mr. Washington. So now the question is put to me, I take it, whether Master George is to be granted his desire. Will you send for him? I would see him before I answer."

Augustine glanced at the clock. It was nearly eleven. The major followed his glance and nodded, smiling. "Send for him," he said.

Augustine reached out for a hand bell-cord, and in a moment a servant appeared and was sent to summon Master George from his bed.

The major took out his big, dented watch, and held it in his hand. There was silence while the two men sat waiting for the boy. Then there was a little sound in the hall, and the door

opened. The major looked up, glanced again at his watch, and put it back again into his pocket.

"Three minutes," he said; "fair prompt."

"George was standing before them in his nightshirt, his feet bare, his hair tumbled, and his blue eyes very wide with sleepy surprise. He held his dear sword in both hands. The major smiled, and held out his hand to him.

"I wanted to say good night to you, George," he said, "that's all. Good night. You may run off to bed again!"

"Good—good night, sir," murmured George, taking the hand, and letting his sword-straps clatter down as he did so.

"Why did you bring your sword, my son?" asked Augustine, drawing him to his side and looking affectionately in his face.

"I don't know, father," said George, "only I couldn't leave it behind."

"Now back to bed," was his father's command, and the boy ran off.

When he was gone, Major Satterthwaite spoke. "Make a soldier of him," he said, nodding to Augustine; "came on the instant, never stopped to put on his clothes, but didn't forget his sword. He'll do!"

"Thank you," returned the other man. "If I am not—there—you'll help him?"

"Yes, I will," promised Major Satterthwaite.

Mary had heard the light steps in the hall, the opening and shutting of a door, but she would not leave her guest in order to find out what was taking place. She had learnt to control the small anxieties and impatience which, unless kept in check, make the house-mistress almost an inquisitor, interfering unduly with the liberty of the subject. But a little later, when all was quiet again, she laid down her work and rose to her feet, Colonel Arbuthnot at once rising also.

"My dear friend," she said, "you must be thinking me both unmannerly and ungrateful! That last, I am not, indeed, but something is wrong this night—Augustine has seemed less well to-day, and perhaps I am nervous. Will you be kind, and make him go to bed soon? I am sure he hath conversed long enough. And will you forgive me if I say good night now? I will go and take a look at the children. Oh colonel, my heart is like lead."

"I know it must be," he said very earnestly, taking her hand in his own. "If you only knew how grieved I am!" he went on, "dear, kind, brave lady, I'd give all I have to help you—you know

that—but I can do nothing, only beg you to hope on and never lose heart! These diseases have strange turnings. Last night he seemed his own self almost.”

“He was in a consuming fever all night,” she said huskily, “and moaned of George and soldiers and battlefields when he did sleep a little. I ought not to have let our friends come. It is all my fault.” She could speak to Arbuthnot with a certain freedom, since he was not a relation, and it comforted her to undo the iron bars of self-restraint for a moment.

“It made no difference,” said the colonel; “he seemed more ill a few days before, when he had seen no one for weeks. Don’t cease to hope, Mrs. Washington—he is living on our hope! Now go and look at your children and find your courage again.”

So Mary went upstairs without returning to the dining-room. The presence of Major Satterthwaite was a menace to her peace. Colonel Arbuthnot, who had been in plenty of Indian skirmishes, but who had no experience of real war, seemed a lazy man, a veritable seeker of peace, beside that great, gaunt, fighting-man, with his discoloured uniform and his common iron cross hanging beside the pewtery disc of King George’s Dettingen medal. Arbuthnot had told her that the little black cross was the highest distinction a brave man could gain. She had not even asked how the major won it. It was given for fighting, for cruelty, for terror—for the thing she shuddered at, war! And yet she felt there was a power in the man or in the thing he represented, which she had not strength to combat. Augustine had spoken warmly of him and enjoyed his companionship; George, for the last twenty-four hours, had had eyes and ears for no one else. Her George! She knew the longings of his heart, knew that Augustine sympathized with them. Would the sword claim her morning child, her boy George, in the end?

She crept silently into the little room where he slept alone now; she shaded the candle with her hand, and looked down at the fair young face, so smooth and happy in sleep. His golden hair was tossed on the pillow, his right hand lay on the coverlet, the fingers closed tight round the little sword which had become such an idol to him. She looked at it with something like hatred. Then she placed the light where it would not shine on his face, and knelt down and prayed that the dearest treasures of her heart might be left to her—George and George’s father.

When she came out of the room Augustine was slowly mounting the shallow oak steps, clinging to the handrail, and leaning on Colonel Arbuthnot’s arm.

"Here he is, Madam Washington," rang out the colonel; "get him to bed and I'll bring him a sleeping draught, for he's been vowing he won't sleep till daylight; and when a man makes up his mind to that—well, that is what will happen unless his kind friends interfere."

"Ah, Molly," said Augustine, as he reached the landing, spent and breathless, "what with doctors and nursing and drugs, you've made a pretty slave of me. D'you remember how I carried you up these same stairs a few years since?"

"I'm meaning you to do it again some day," she said, smiling bravely, "unless George insists upon a prior right. Thank you, colonel," she said, as Arbuthnot released Augustine's hot, thin hand, and Mary drew it within her arm, "I'll come to you for the draught in a few minutes. You'll find everything in the still room—there's the key."

And she pulled off her housewife's chain, with its jingling keys, and handed it over to him.

A few minutes later Augustine was sitting in the linen-covered easy-chair before the fire of his bedroom. His servant had taken away boots and coat, and had left him wrapped in a warm dressing-gown. Mary leaned over the back of his chair, her two hands on his shoulders.

"Now, my dearest, one, two, three, as we say to the children, and in with you." And she pointed to the mountainous bed whence an enormous warming-pan with a six-foot handle had just been removed.

"Let me stay here a little," he said; "'tis as warm and quiet, and I have you to myself."

"Just a little then," she answered, coming forward and standing by his side. He took her hand and she stooped down and kissed his hair.

"I suppose it has all been said a thousand times over," he murmured, "but I must say it this once more—Molly, I do love you!"

"Do you, sweetheart?" she replied, kneeling down, as of old, by his chair, and looking into his face with eyes of purest, brightest affection. "I don't think I love you, Augustine!"

"What!" he laughed, throwing an arm round her neck and drawing her closer to him. "What is this then, madam?" and he kissed her lips, which answered passionately.

"Worship!" she cried, her eyes blazing with love and defiance. "Oh, my dear, 'tis of no use! Nothing shall part us. Never dare to leave me! Promise you will not leave me!" She was

face to face with the love of a life and the terror of a day, an hour—some one had warned her that the end might come at any time.

Augustine, calm because already so physically detached from earth, drew her head to his breast, leaned his cheek against her golden hair, and held her to him till she also grew calmer. Then, without letting her look up, he spoke hurriedly, for these were words which had waited long to be said, and must be delayed no longer.

"My own true wife," he said, "I fear—I think, we have to part. God knows when. And there are things to say. Nay, do not struggle, sweetheart, I can only say them thus, not seeing your face—it is too dear to me. Molly, remember, that since I married you, you have not brought me one single moment's pain, save when I have seen you suffer, and for that, my dear, brave girl, I thank you from the bottom of my heart, and I pray God that each child you have borne may bring you untold blessings in the years to come. It is the least you sweet mothers do deserve. My darling, your beauty has been the very joy of your man's eyes, your goodness the faith of his soul, your sweetness the promise of his salvation. I have been careless, Molly, as men are, you know, but I have watched you, and I would say now and for ever, I believe, I hope, I trust, what my wife believes, and hopes, and trusts. That's my confession of faith, dear." He paused, half exhausted with so much speaking, and Molly, with her tears raining down on his breast, felt his quick, fluttering heart-beats come and go. She could not speak—the certainty of parting was rending her, and she had to bear it dumb or shriek in his arms. In a moment he went on, and every sense in her sprang to despairing alertness lest she should lose a single tone of the hollow, husky voice.

"So, love, remember, it has been all whiteness, all sunshine, all glory—to me and to you. We can live on that till we find each other again. But, oh Molly, that I should have to leave you—with the children so young, with all these burdens on your shoulders!"

He felt her shiver in his arms and mistook her anguish for fear. "But you will carry it all bravely, wife; there never was a woman so brave, so wise. Lawrence will do all he can—thank God he is grown man now! And my son George will help you. They are all good, loving children—God bless them; but George—George will be your comfort and your crown, my Molly, he hath a soldier's heart—had I lived—he would—Molly, look at

me—is the light gone out? The room seems dark! Where are you? Oh, my God—what pain!”

She was holding him in her arms, reaching out for water to throw on his face, which had fallen back, grey and drawn, on her shoulder. She was trying to lift him, to lay him on his bed; her arms were like steel, no sense was left but the sense that she could help him. She had opened his stock to ease the gasping breath, and with the strength that comes of love and terror, actually lifted the tall man and laid him on the bed. As she fell across him, powerless to unclasp her hands after that superhuman strain, she heard a knock, heard the door open, and gathered every force of her being into a cry for help. Then Arbuthnot was at her side, and she was freed and set on her feet where she could look down into her husband's face. All her presence of mind came back. A bottle of cordial was close at hand on a table by the bed. She poured out a glass and held it to those white, strained lips. Arbuthnot snatched it from her hand and poured some between them, most of the liquid spilling itself on pillow and shirt.

“When did this happen?” asked Arbuthnot, his face nearly as white as Augustine's. He tore open the shirt and bent low and listened for a heart-beat. As he raised his head, Mary saw the rapier scar on her husband's breast.

“Now,” she gasped. “He was speaking a minute ago. Has he fainted?”

“Yes,” said the colonel; “run, get hot bricks, hot brandy, anything you can think of.” He wanted to get her out of the room.

She obeyed in a flash. After she was gone, the colonel turned Augustine on his side, tried to pump air into his lungs, employed methods she would have called brutal, in the attempt to restore animation. He heard some one passing.

“Satterthwaite,” he cried, “come here, quick.”

The major entered, and reached the bed in two strides. As he looked down at Augustine, he groaned. “Dead—poor fellow!” he said. “Stop that, Arbuthnot, you'll do no good; lay him straight before the wife sees him.”

The servants were hurrying about downstairs; Mary was returning, her hands were full, she was bringing flannels, brandy, anything she could find in her haste and terror. Some one was standing outside the chamber door; the things were taken from her, then she was allowed to pass. She saw Colonel Arbuthnot hastily drawing the sheet up over Augustine's form.

BOOK IV

THE MAKING OF A MAN

CHAPTER I

THE divine ordinance, "They two shall be one flesh" does operate that which it affirms in the ideal union of man and wife. The ideal union is very rare; but, where it has existed, a definite part of the humanity of both is swallowed up in the death of one, and the survivor must make shift as best a cripple can for the remainder of the road.

Mary Washington had said, when she lost her infant daughter, "The child hath taken her part of my heart into her grave." But when Augustine died his Mary died with him. His death was not to her a severance, but an execution. The wife was buried in the husband's grave, and the woman who remained visibly in Mary's place was a creature of brain and conscience, built up through long years of faith in God and duty to man, born full-grown at last out of a death agony, and prepared to step into the post of mother, mistress, citizen, when the radiant lover who had given her birth should be killed.

"She has not wept, she is grown hard," said the womenfolk of her kin, some of them widows more than one, but now wedded again. They rallied round her, shedding easy tears for the unapproachable dead, and speaking consoling words in ears that heard them not. "I pray you to hold me excused, there is much to be done," was all the answer they had from the cold woman whose face never relaxed from its stern calm in their sight, who moved about her house of mourning with quiet vigilance, ordering all things aright, and tightening rather than slackening the accustomed restraints over those dependent on her. When some well-meaning friend said to her, "Remember all the blessings

that remain to you ! You have your children still," she replied with something like scorn in her icy voice, " Five ; the eldest not eleven, and I sole guardian. Oh, I shall not forget."

The only moments when she felt weakened were those which brought her some evidence of George's understanding. His temperament matched her own. The younger children had given way to noisy grief, and their mother had calmed and controlled them, kind and dry-eyed herself. But George was silent. His dead father was too sacredly dear to be publicly mourned. He gathered up the little mementoes and presents which spoke of Augustine's love for his son, and put them away in a corner of his own room where the others would not handle them, and the day after the funeral, without waiting for orders from his mother, he took his younger brothers away to spend the day with Colonel Arbuthnot, leaving her to unexpected silence and peace, sorely needed for her much-tried strength. Betty had been wisely carried off by Mrs. Willis, who feared the atmosphere of mournful tension for the mercurial little girl as much as she feared some light-hearted reaction on Betty's part for Betty's sorrow-frozen mother.

Mary thought it would be all one to her whether they went or stayed ; but when the cruel necessities of funeral hospitalities were satisfied, when the relations had all departed, and even the children were absent, she was conscious of being able to breathe with a little less effort. She held her head as high, moved about as relentlessly, as she had done during the past days of horror—she would be unfit for life if she relaxed her grip on herself for a moment, and life, stern, commanding, had already issued its orders, each of which she would scrupulously fulfil—but the silence and emptiness brought some physical relief, for which she was thankful after an impersonal manner.

She dared not sit still ; to read or to pray would have been fatal. Thought must be kept in iron bands if reason were still to be its housemate. So she decided to set to work at some papers which she knew required docketing ; the results of these would have to be copied into the great book of farm returns and expenses which Augustine kept personally at Pine Grove, although for some months before his death he had relinquished even this occupation almost entirely into Mary's hands.

Resolutely turning her eyes from little familiar objects which seemed clamouring for her tears, she sat down at the secretary table and opened the deep drawer where the books and papers were kept. The great leather-bound folio lay open across the drawer. The accounts, carefully filed and numbered, were tied

into a packet on one side of it, the head of each just appearing over the top of the last. And on the book, written in a clear though childish hand, lay this note :

"Honoured Madam, I do hope you will not be displeased that I have taken it upon me to sum up and enter the month's bills, thinking to save you trouble. Accounts correct as certified by me.

"Your obedient and dutiful son,
"GEORGE."

Then poor Mary's head went down upon the open drawer, and she wept indeed.

Many times during the months that followed was she met by similar instances of her boy's patient comprehension and sympathy. With great self-denial he refrained from telling her of his father's promise that he should be sent to some more advanced teacher than his present one. He considered that she had enough to think of, and he would not be himself the cause of another perplexity. Some time later, Lawrence, discovering the state of affairs, took the matter into his own hands and proposed to his step-mother a change for George, and then the boy had the satisfaction of at least not wasting his time. The change involved early rising and late home-coming, and long hours spent on the lonely road, but that was as nothing to the ardent nature which counted each mental process achieved as one more weapon added to his armoury for success. It mattered not that all directions were at present clouded and uncertain for the boy. That his father's death had left as sole arbiter of his destiny the one person who would forbid that destiny to fulfil his secret hopes ; dutiful to scrupulousness where his only remaining commander was concerned, he seems to have had the blind or supernatural burst which makes the saint and the genius trust that nothing is lost, that the best is but delayed to be given more fully at last. And so, silently and humbly, the gallant lad set himself to work out and master each task and problem and axiom that was presented to his mind, never ashamed of long, careful study of some simple seeming thing, resolved that neither simplicity nor difficulty should cheat him into knowing less than all there was to be known about it. Naturally reserved, he grew voluntarily more so. Mary, absorbed in a thousand difficulties of her new position, did little at first to draw the boy out of himself, and their intercourse was less one of words than of alert and mutual helpfulness, acknowledged

as often as not by a mere glance of approval and gratitude on her part, or a request to be allowed to perform some new service for her on his. It was only years later, when he had gone out to lead his own life, that his mother realized what the boy's silent championship and unfaltering adherence had done for her at this time. Whoever questioned her decrees, George steadily upheld them. Her personal authority was indeed sufficient to silence all dissent in her presence ; but Betty was a bit of a rebel at heart, and, in the children's conclaves held in the old attic playroom or out among the more distant garden-walks, would speak her mind very freely about some privation or prohibition which interfered with her wilful pleasure. She soon learnt, however, that such sentiments must not be expressed when George was by. He had a decided manner of saying, "Orders are orders, sister, and you had better regard them as such!" So that Betty and her three brothers came to look upon George as more their mother's coadjutor than their own, a view which made greatly for peace and discipline in the altered household.

For there was the secret cause of these discontents. The frame of life was altered to one more frugal, more hard-working, less broad and sunny in some ways than it had been before Augustine's death. Mary, brave woman and careful thinker as she was, had not escaped the chill of fear which every woman must feel on finding herself left alone to bring up a family of children and to provide for each according to her own wishes and their father's intentions. The patrimony which Augustine had devised to his heirs would require constant care and nursing in order to yield full value as each came of age to receive it from Mary's hands. Long years must pass ere even George's portion should be removed from her immediate jurisdiction, and the relinquishing of responsibility towards the younger children seemed just now terribly, indefinitely, distant, only to be hoped for after endless time and thought should have been bestowed upon it. Even then, would the land alone suffice to maintain four sons in the position to which they were born when it was all in the hands of a single owner, a man of ripe experience in such matters too, as Augustine Washington had been? As for the pretty daughter, she would of course marry, and her patrimony would be all-sufficient to ensure her independence and enhance her dignity in the family of her husband; but the case of the boys was far different. Their mother must make it a sacred duty to save all that it was rightly possible to save for them; and this alone was not enough. They should be prepared to make honourable

careers for themselves, and earn the money necessary to increase their capital.

What such careers should be it was impossible to foresee, much less to decide at present, and Mary confined her claims on the future of her sons to utilizing everything that could go, broadly speaking, to make that future honest and prosperous in their own land. She dreaded change, she dreaded ambition, she dreaded above all things the tinsel and savagery which, in her eyes, made war. Had she had heart to formulate a dream in these days of inward stress and fear, she would doubtless have prayed that her boys might be peaceable landowners and citizens, men of mark in their neighbourhood certainly, perhaps one a judge, for honoured traditions' and distinctions' sake. But just now her fears were more real than her hopes. There was little heart in her to look forward while recent calamity made apprehension a chill familiar guest. So, for prudential reasons, the younger boys continued to go to a plain parish school, and it was only through the kindness of his half-brother Augustine (now residing at Wakefield as its proprietor) that George was able to profit by the teaching of Doctor Williams, the old tutor of both Augustine and Lawrence. The boy spent much time at Wakefield, and rejoiced in the higher instruction for which he had so long hungered. But there was no talk of a university career to follow, either for him or for his younger brothers at Pine Grove. There, life had become very frugal and plain; costly garments were laid away, to be replaced in daily use by more homely and durable ones; luxuries were banished from the simple but always abundant table, and food itself was regarded as something too sacred to be wasted and scorned. The children were taught to be self-reliant, to perform for themselves many little offices which their contemporaries would have demanded from their slaves; and the slaves, while being made to work obediently and methodically, were not allowed to be treated by the young masters like mere chattels who had no claim to consideration. This indeed was no new thing. Mary had long realized a fact which few mothers apprehend—that children are naturally selfish beings, and that the only way to ensure their having kind hearts is to insist upon kind behaviour to all with whom they come in contact.

But above all things Mary feared for her children the contagion of the world, of its frivolity, its aimlessness, its degraded ambitions and corrupting ease. These should not be so much as mentioned in the family. All ties of kinship and old friendship were affectionately fostered and preserved, but there was not,

even after the ordinary period of mourning had elapsed, any part taken in the endless gaieties of town and country neighbours.

Colonial society at that time was superlatively easy-going, careless of all good except good-fellowship, and humorously tolerant of all except disgrace, since it was unawakened yet to the necessity of the Spartan virtue and self-restraint which it was called upon to display some years later; and Mary Washington would have none of it in the home of which she was now sole and trusted keeper.

With these careful honours of her loneliness weighing her down, what wonder that the very conscience towards her children made her draw the cords of discipline a little tighter than a more careless woman would have done in her place? What wonder that her deep, earnest love for them showed itself in a certain gentle austerity, instead of in the old playful, caressing affection which had lapped their infancy? The slighter the hand that wields the sceptre, the firmer, the more watchful must be the grasp thereof. Her husband's death lifted Mary into the difficult part of single responsibility where popularity must needs be sacrificed to justice, reciprocal confidence renounced for isolated and awed respect. Be a king the warmest-hearted of men, he shall find no equal among his subjects save at his and their peril.

It was not till long after this first year of widowhood was over that Mary comprehended the merciful avail to her own spirit of all her many tasks. They had been accepted singly and collectively as the weightiest of necessary burdens; they were in truth the strong arms which carried her through her hours of weakness and danger. To such characters as hers there is but one medicine for grief, and its name is duty. Many a time she bestowed a thought of passing envy on some woman who, afflicted in like manner, was at leisure to retire from the world and weep at will, to remember hour by hour and day by day the sweetness and the glory of departed love. No such mournful privilege had been hers; her time, from the first hours after her husband's death, had belonged to others, and very soon it came to be so minutely meted out to adjust the claims on it, that extreme care and method were required in order to satisfy them all. The reading of some portion of a good book, and meditating devoutly thereon, had been a lifelong habit with Mary. She clung to it still, but the time had to be curtailed so that she might gather the children around her and do the same thing for them. Her blank desolation of inward solitude—broken by no ray of light, beyond sober trust in God, for the first two or

three years—she ascribed to the busy nature of her occupations, which filled her mind even when her hands were at rest. She had heard bereaved persons speak more or less expansively about spiritual reunion with departed friends and loves, of communion of thought and hope so strong that the absence of visible presence was as nothing in comparison with the enfolding certainty of invisible love and interest. At first she listened, wondering that those so blessed should find words wherewith to publish their experiences; then, after months of interior night, during which not a single star-ray of sense of thought or message fell adown the dark to her from her lost love, Mary told herself that either she had become unworthy of such spiritual succour because of the engrossing cares of her material world, or that the persons who boasted of their disembodied bliss were babblers of things beyond their ken, spiritual humbugs unworthy of credit or emulation.

Never had her own soul's life been so dry and parched as during these years. Consolations never came to her, either in conscious influx of Divine Love, or in visions of any radiant happiness enveloping the spirit of him whom she had lost. All that was granted her, and granted boundlessly, was first the strength needful for her daily tasks, and then the other strength required to maintain her trust in God. Hard food of strong hearts, known to the saints as the "Black Bread of God," bitter, yet sustaining, nourishing heroic souls to greater stature than they could have attained on the sweet ecstasies of love and joy, and enabling them to perform tasks of almost superhuman difficulty. Those who receive it and ask for naught else, learn that there is a greater thing than joy, a higher crown than love—satisfaction of the faithful servant, satisfaction of the Silent Master.

Following these paths with womanly reserve and dignity, yet with virile singleness of heart, her best friends and only counsellors were men. The awe she inspired in her own sex by her apartness from its ordinary weaknesses, was given back to her in respect and comprehension by the masculine element in her family and circle of neighbours. Apart from her hatred of bloodshed, from her apparently unexplained horror of the sword, inspired by one secret and terrible memory, her views of life and duty were those of the best men of her time, and she loved power as a strong man loves it. Her self-reliance brought her numberless outside interests, the improvement of her land and the traffic in its products, the breeding of thoroughbred horses and magnificent cattle, the disciplining of her dependents in skill and obedience—all these

things kept her faculties alert, developed her mental resources, and prevented her training of her children from degenerating through over-watchfulness into a morbid, unhealthy anxiety about their souls and bodies. Certain broad rules were laid down, and these must be obeyed with military exactitude; outside of those lines the young people must judge for themselves, and learn to apply to their daily lives the maxims which had been set before them. Honour, courage, obedience, were the cardinal virtues whose absence would never be condoned. Swift and stern was the retribution for untruth, shirking, or neglect of orders; but the pardon for other faults was quick and generous, as it had ever been when they had no low, mean motive as their origin.

Children accustomed to such ruling from their cradles were hardly likely to fall into deceit or cowardice, since it is only the tyrant who makes the slave. Mary's anxieties were rather in a contrary direction. These sturdy, high-spirited Virginian lads, with their one imperious little sister the companion of their games, did from time to time break out of bounds, through sheer vitality and love of novelty. And then Mary, like a wise woman, gave back with one hand what she might have taken away with the other, encouraging the love of adventure, but insensibly leading it in more worthy directions.

In George she found a strength of will which equalled her own, and she was profoundly thankful for the chivalry which made the boy refrain from setting it in opposition to hers. Occasionally he took the initiative in some matter which he had decided to his own satisfaction should be carried through, and the success with which he executed his purpose made her deeply apprehensive of any real struggle with him. The affection which united mother and son was of unusual strength and completeness, the give and take of two strong, well-balanced characters, resembling and thoroughly respecting each other, almost overshadowed the passionate, brooding love of a mother for her first-born on the one side, the clinging affection of a son to his only remaining parent on the other. But each had reserves which remained impenetrable. Each felt in the other a force or quality unexplained, present, invulnerable to argument, deaf to appeal, beyond all interjurisdiction. Mary had probed the boy's heart only to find that its highest and hottest loyalty was given to something in which she had no share, and on which her opinion weighed not for a moment with him, although deference to her spoken word sealed his lips on the subject. Once and once only, some two years after his father's death, George had confided to her the subject of that last con-

versation, and Augustine's promise to help him towards the goal of his ardent ambition, to make him a soldier. The boy said what was needed to put her in possession of the facts, and then, with all the passion of two years of pent-up, silent longing, had made his formal request to be allowed to enter the army. She had foreseen and dreaded the request, had hoped against hope that her son would change his mind and never make it.

To Mary the moment was horrible. Augustine's last words to herself had shown what his decision would have been. But even his wish—she had told herself a thousand times that it had been expressed without due consideration, dragged from him by his weakness when he was least capable of giving it sound judgment—could not sway her to consent. The mild and sober reasoning which came to her aid on all other subjects forsook her here. Ian McClean's rapier had made the sword her enemy for ever. With the only outburst of anger that her boy had ever witnessed in her, she bade him be silent, and never on his peril repeat the demand. George had stiffened, bowed formally, and left her, and, as far as words went, had never again reverted to the subject. That very day he chanced to see Major Satterthwaite's towering form, clothed in the old uniform which was now everywhere saluted with amused respect, clanking down one of the streets of Fredericksburg, and had turned aside in cold fury from a meeting with the man who represented all he would and could never be. The major, always interested in the brave lad, had seen him, and called to him, upon which George came forward and went through the proper greetings; but nothing would induce him to go and pay a visit to the major's rooms, a treat which usually raised him to the seventh heaven of delight. The boy made some excuse, and left his tall friend looking after him in grave concern. This was the first time that young George had ever parted from him of his own accord, and as at this time he was coming to Fredericksburg each day to attend his new school, their meetings had been frequent, and almost as full of pleasure to the man as to the boy.

"Something wrong at home," mused Satterthwaite. "I told poor Washington that I would help the child, though why he should have asked me, a stranger, to help his son, with half the State to his kin, I never knew. I will go and find out what is the matter."

So a day or two later he called on Mrs. Washington, and had the good fortune to find her alone. Her feelings towards him were strangely mixed; respect and repulsion, terrible memories

called up by his having been present at Augustine's death, Augustine's liking for him, her own vague fear that he might influence George's choice of a career—all these things made it hard for her to receive him with her usual calm grace.

He went at once to the matter in hand. "Madam," he said, when he had bestowed his sword in a corner, and his own huge length in a stiff, high-backed chair opposite to his hostess, "has your son George any cause of quarrel with me?"

The idea of the boy of thirteen setting up a formal quarrel with this military giant was quaint enough to make Mrs. Washington smile in spite of herself. Then a sudden anxiety chased away the smile.

"I trust George hath not been guilty of any impoliteness towards you, sir?" she said. "It would grieve me deeply to hear of such a thing."

"By no means," the major assured her; "his manners must be inherited, madam, for I have never seen better on old or young. But, as doubtless you know, he hath sometimes paid me a visit, enjoying the sight of some battered objects in my rooms, and listening with glad indulgence as a boy will, to such of an old soldier's stories as it may do him no disservice to hear. Now on Monday I did repeat the invitation, and Master George thanked me for it—and ran from me. If this was by reason of your commands, I have nothing to say, but that it deprives me of a great pleasure, which, if you will pardon me for referring to the saddest of subjects, the young gentleman's late respected father did in a manner bequeath to me, since he honoured me by asking me to be friend to his son."

The major had made this speech with slow deliberation, watching Mrs. Washington's face intently as she listened to it. At the close he had seen all and a little more than he expected to see, and he lowered his eyes and stared at the toe of his boot while she sat mute, trying to find calm speech wherewith to clothe hot anger.

Major Satterthwaite, the most direct and simple of men, was unconscious of the full extent of the storm which his words had aroused. Mary's first sentiment was one of deeply wounded pride and jealousy. She learnt now that Augustine, unknown to her, had asked this stranger to be his son's friend. In her sudden resentment—the first she had ever felt towards an adored, immaculate memory—she overlooked the fact that Augustine had probably intended to tell her of the request and his reasons for making it. All she saw was the evidence that she had been

excluded from some important thoughts of his mind during his last few hours on earth, and its bitterness was overwhelming. Reason would come later to tell her how ungrounded was the cruel suspicion, but at this moment the humiliation it brought blinded her to that. For a moment it flashed into her mind that the major might be deceiving her for some unexplained motive of his own, and she raised her eyes to search his face for a trace of falsehood. Her own was set and white and full of accusation, but when she met those brilliant blue eyes, clear as daylight and regarding her with grave pity, it was impossible to doubt the man for a moment.

It seemed to her as if the silence had lasted long, too long; she must speak, or it would give Major Satterthwaite the clue to feelings which it would be an outrage to herself to divulge. So she went back and caught at the earlier part of his speech, her own voice almost out of control as she did so.

"You have honoured George beyond his deserts, sir," she said slowly, but with concentrated wrath; "it is no part of my plan for his schooling in Fredericksburg that he should listen to what you are pleased to call old soldier's stories. I doubt if such do make for instruction or edification, and am better pleased that he hear no more. George did wisely to come away."

"Madam," replied the major, stiffly, "I regret to hear you speak thus. Mr. Washington was not of this mind when he asked me to relate one such tale, with his son, much younger than he is now, sitting by his side. But let be, since such is your desire. This I will ask you, for my own justification and that of the boy, and I pray you to answer me: has it been with or without your permission that George has paid me some visits?"

"Neither with nor without it, sir," Mary said hotly. "George has a general permission, founded on his own good sense and the character of all our friends, to pay a visit between his school hours, or after they are over, to any person who hath been received in his home, provided that he be modest and importune them not. I trust him implicitly." And Mary's head went up as she faced the major's quiet glance. "I ask no questions and he is little given to chatter of his day's doings. But I will say, sir, that if you have been encouraging him in a desire which is against my judgment for him, I shall consider that, in spite of your respected character and position, you have done him and me the worst of disservice."

"That would grieve me most sincerely, Mrs. Washington," the major replied. "Before pleading guilty to such a grave

accusation I will ask you to specify it. What such strong desire has George for a thing of which you disapprove? I should consider him a singularly right-thinking and upright boy."

"We will take that for granted if you please, sir," was Mary's proud reply.

"Well," returned the major, "do right-thinking boys nurse secret rebellions, madam? Or is it mere general suspicion of my bad qualities which led to that very serious charge you made against me but now?"

"I have nothing to do with your qualities, Major Satterthwaite," cried Mrs. Washington, at white heat; "doubtless, they are admirable—for a soldier. But that my son shall never be!"

"Why?" asked the great, dark man, fixing an inquisitor's eyes upon her.

She was not bound to answer, for in putting the question he was perhaps overstepping the limits of mere friendly acquaintance, but there never lived a woman who would refuse to reply to a direct question if the questioner were a man. "Because it is a cruel, ungodly, savage trade," said poor Mary, "and woe's me, the boy is in love with it!"

"Then it will have him when all's said and done, madam," was the major's quick reply, "and you are too wise and brave a woman to believe what you have just said about it. See, Mrs. Washington, here am I, a battered fighting-man, down on my knees to you, as it were, to beg you to listen to what I have to say. 'Tis true that your son's heart is where mine has been these many years; but, believe me, madam, there is no trade so noble that a villain will not degrade it, none so rough that a gentleman will not make it fine and clean. You spoke now of cruelty, savagery, ungodliness! The army is not the home of these. It is the officer's business to make such things impossible. For cruelty, has any soldier ever matched the canny merchant who drenches Africa in blood to provide America with her slaves? The veriest ruffian that ever carried a musket would feel his gorge rise at the horrors of the slave-ship. For savagery, what fighting man can equal our town Mohawk, our fine London gentleman who murders citizens, ravishes innocent girls, laughs at blood and spits at virtue? For ungodliness, mate me our evil-living deans and proud bishops! Who advised the poor Queen to bring a prettier fool to cozen her husband into docility to his ministers? A soldier? No, ma'am, a bishop.* Ah, I have shocked you—such

* The Bishop of Roxburghe.

things are not for such ears—but upon my soul you shall know, though you never forgive me for the telling it to you—if there be a fine, merciful, gentleman's trade left in this evil world, it is the trade of the soldier."

He had risen in his indignation, and stood before her, the incarnation of honest, gallant, ill-paid service to humanity. The woman was what he had called her, too brave and wise to withstand the onset of his truth. Mary had covered her face with her hands, not as he thought, in horror at his words, but to battle with that truth alone. There was a moment's silence. Then she rose and stood before him, a pale, beautiful, vindictive woman, wearing the widow's black garb for the husband of whom she had been robbed by the sword.

"Major Satterthwaite," she said, "I will never again use calumny of your trade. I was wrong, and I beg your pardon. But between me and it is a quarrel that shall not be settled this side of eternity. My son shall not be a soldier."

In silence he bowed over her hand, slowly buckled on his sword, and left her.

"What a soldier the woman would have made," he thought, as he jingled back to Fredericksburg.

CHAPTER II

A MONTH after these events George went to pay a visit to his half-brother Lawrence, now a married man of two years' standing, and living on the old Washington estate, which had twice changed its name and which, not many years later, became the property of the young half-brother, who was always a welcome visitor there. Lawrence had taken to wife Anne Fairfax, a young relative of the famous peer who was to prove a good friend to George ere long, and George felt more at home with Lawrence and kind Mrs. Anne than he could feel at Pine Grove just now. With Lawrence he could talk openly of his hopes and disappointments, and the indulgent affection of the elder made him inclined to take the junior's part in the decorous war of wills now existing between George and his mother.

Lawrence was even now in delicate health, but his own tastes and admirations coincided with those of the boy, and he grieved that the ardent young spirit should meet with such determined opposition to its soaring bent. He offered to argue and expostulate with Mary, but George begged him to do nothing of the sort.

"You know, brother, that she never changes her mind," said the clear-sighted boy, already a better judge of character than his senior. "It will but distress her, and do me no good. Nor would I take a grudging concession could you wring it from her. I owe her much—let her take her payment from me in her own way—I can never repay all the debt. But, for God's sake, Lawrence, find a man's work for me to do, and let it be something that she shall not hate. The best part of me is poor enough. I have no doubt but it is fair expiring of inaction! I am nearly fourteen, and I lead the life of a child."

It was true. The boy was as ready for his life's work as the education available for him would ever make him, and each day that went by now was a lost day to him. He had studied mathematics, navigation, geography, surveying—he had the eye of an

eagle and the heart of a hero, and he was condemned to pass his time in watching laggard companions and contemporaries still stumbling over the beginnings of learnings which to him were child's play. He seemed to be feeling the edge of his weapons with the ugly certainty of finding them dulled by rust.

Lawrence pondered a while, following out a thought which had been in his mind for some time regarding his brother's future.

"What should you say to the sea, George?" he asked at last.

George's face lighted up. "It would be glorious," he cried, "but do you believe my mother would consent? 'Tis parlous like to soldiering, Lawrie!" And he laughed rather shakily over his own desperate case.

"I think your mother might be persuaded," Lawrence replied. "You see, George, a midshipman, for all he doth wear the King's uniform and claps a dirk to his side, is scarce likely to see much fighting in these waters, and may never be sent to Europe at all. Oh, you may have your own hopes, boy," for George's face had fallen at the uninviting prospect. "War is a child of chance, and leaps on us unexpectedly and full-grown, like Madame Minerva from her father's too active brain—but there is no need to remind our lady mother of that! She hath but happy, kind memories of the sea, as I have often heard her say. Let these direct her decision now, and maybe we'll score a victory."

"You are the best brother a man ever had," said George, rather huskily. "Indeed, Lawrence, I cannot thank you, but I'll never forget!"

It did not occur to Lawrence to smile at George's description of himself. The tall, broad-shouldered lad, with his level glance and courteous yet independent manner, could already claim equality with his elder's manhood.

So when George returned to Pine Grove a week later, Lawrence came with him and stayed for a few days. Mary was much attached to Augustine's eldest son, and often turned to him for advice on minor matters. In great ones she had a preference for the counsel of the men of his father's generation where she needed counsel at all. She never asked it unless she meant to take it. Lawrence was a gentle, refined man, with the most scrupulous ideals of conduct, and she felt that George was fortunate in possessing such a guide and friend. When he broached the subject of George's future, she frankly told him of her perplexities, of her son's own wish and her irrevocable refusal thereof. Lawrence did not attempt to argue that side of the case,

but skilfully laid before her the possibility of a compromise which would satisfy George and which he painted for Mary in such sober colours that even her timidity could take little alarm. He had influence enough, through the Fairfax family, to obtain a midshipman's commission for his brother on one of the King's ships in American waters, he told her; the lad would see in it the possibility of a life of action and adventure such as he longed for, but would be under the strict supervision of his superiors, and would be permitted to run no unnecessary risks—would she not think it over and give her consent?

Mary, who had been feeling some pangs of self-reproach for the manner in which she had received her beloved son's request, softened and promised to think it over. She had hurt him and was longing to heal the wound, but in reality felt scarcely more drawn to this scheme than to the other. Lawrence departed, telling George that he considered the matter hopeful and should at once begin the necessary negotiations, but that George must stay at home and do all he could by patience and good conduct to make his mother give judgment for him.

"Have no fear, Lawrie," the boy replied, "I have hope now, and that will keep me busy until the fulfilment comes."

Then Mary, half frightened at having almost consented to such a step without consulting an older person, wrote to her brother Joseph, asking his views on the matter. Joseph had been Augustine's friend, and ever the kindest of brothers to herself, but it is doubtful whether these were her only reasons for appealing to him. She dreaded the moment of decision, whichever way it should go, and she could now put it off for at least six months—the time which must elapse before she could receive Joseph's reply.

Those six months were terribly trying to both mother and son. George had never been so kind, so dutiful, so considerate as now, although he sometimes thought he must die of the suspense he was bearing. To Mary he was dearer every day, her right hand and supporter, her comfort and crown, as his father had foretold. When her inmost heart told her she could never let him go, it bled at the pain she must inflict by withholding her consent; when her mood was more self-renouncing, and she felt that it might be her duty to give him up, she quailed at the loss which she must suffer—a loss which seemed insupportable in her widowed life. No son or daughter would ever take the place of her eldest-born. Lawrence, meanwhile, was not idle, and did all that he could to forward the plan. When Mary told him that she was waiting to hear from George's uncle he laughed outright at

the thought that Mr. Ball, in distant London, could judge better for the boy than those who were on the spot and had known him all his life. He was anxious to get the matter arranged before the English letter should arrive, having no great opinion of the judgment of a man who had left an assured position in Virginia to become one of a crowd of obscure persons in London. As time went on his nervousness increased as to what dire effects the expected letter might have greatly increased, and with eagerness only matched by that of George himself, pushed the preparations forward. He obtained the commission—a document beheld by George with joy bordering on madness—fitted out the youngster with his first uniform and all the other properties of his state, properties so incomparably precious in the lad's eyes, and boldly announced to Mrs. Washington that George must join his ship at once.

Then she yielded, and went through a day or two of anguish which brought the first streaks of white into her beautiful hair; George thanked her with tears in his eyes, and vowed she should never regret her generosity. All his confidence returned, and he told her of his joy, of his hopes of distinction, and they clung together lovingly and tearfully, every barrier broken down between them, and both so happy in this reunion of the heart that all strain and dissension seemed forgotten for ever. Lawrence hovered near, wildly anxious now to get George away, telling himself that at any moment some interfering relative or the arrival of Joseph's answer, already overdue, might disastrously alter the situation.

And then the letter came, the stupid, narrow-minded letter to which Joseph Ball owes his only place in history, and in which, we would fain believe, he did his own understanding very scant justice.

The reaction was instantaneous. Reading his dismal prognostication for the young sailor's future, Mary rebelled. Would she let her beautiful, high-born boy go to be treated "like a dog or a slave," cuffed and sworn at, forced to the most menial tasks? No, indeed! It would break his heart, and hers. Lawrence stormed, George became dumb with despair, but Mary Washington would have her way. His precious possessions were brought back from the ship, and, Mary insensible for once through her own terror and excitement to the suffering she was causing him, George was commanded to take off the King's uniform and sink once more into subjection and obscurity.

The revulsion nearly broke his heart. Rebellion to her legitimate authority was impossible to his honour. Cast in

the soldier's mould, his young soul could conceive of no other form of duty but the obedience to his only commander. George was to rebel but once, and then in such royal justice that Heaven and Earth would range themselves on his side. But not now. He accepted what seemed the sorrow of a lifetime with silent dignity in this his ardent, early youth, and remained obediently at his mother's side.

None dreamed then that this astonishing piece of womanish weakness in Mary, utterly incomprehensible in a character built up of love and courage and gallant good sense, was the crowning interference of jealous destiny, holding back its darling for deeds of surpassing greatness. His place was being kept for him in the firing line, among heroes and patriots, and no lesser honours should be permitted to lure him from it. His mother knew not the name of her superb ally, and bore the brunt of her family's criticism, of Lawrence's just anger, of the hourly presence of George's mute despair in dogged silence and without a single attempt at justification of her act.

Perhaps the year that followed was the hardest and saddest ever passed by mother and son. There was nothing to say. Each was bitterly lonely. George at least was supported by the consciousness of having done right; Mary had not even that qualified consolation. Logically, she had done wrong; and every time her glance fell on the proud, sad face of her boy, the fact was brought home to her. She became shy and timid in her dealings with him, hesitated to expound her wishes, knowing that she had given him reason to mistrust her affection and her judgment. When the wind howled in winter she shuddered at the thought that had he been out at sea at its mercy she would have gone mad with anxiety; she took comfort from the knowledge that he was safe and warm under the parental roof. Then, on one such night, she entered his room, thinking to break down the barrier between them, at least a little, by some kind talk, some pleasant proposal of a little journey or visit. Her heart ached as with another widowhood, at the loss of his confidence and friendship.

George was standing at his window, which he had thrown wide open, looking out at the storm and drinking in its splendid, riotous freedom. On his little table a parchment torn across was spread out under the guttering candle. It was his midshipman's commission. He turned and came towards her—a beautiful, upright youth, taller than herself, with two big tears on his sorrowful face, and eyes that seemed to see in his mother the destroyer of his

holiest hopes. Ere he had time to ask her her pleasure she turned and fled from him, and morning found her in her unshared chamber, weeping for his grief and her own.

When he was fifteen he came and told her that he had found an occupation of which he trusted she would approve. His tone was grave and respectful as ever, but there was a new note of defiance in it which warned her that there must be no interference this time. The boy was man now, and looked down from his father's height on the woman who had borne him.

Mary glanced up in silent apprehension, but answered as calmly as if she had been awaiting the announcement. Her armour of pride and strength would never fail her again.

"I am glad to hear it, my son," she said. "What is it that you have decided to do?" The words proclaimed her abdication.

"I have accepted the post of surveyor to Lord Fairfax," he replied; and added, with a touch of bitterness, "The work is not ambitious, but it is at least permissible, and I believe I am fitted for it. I trust it meets with your views for me."

It is hard for a woman to unlearn the trade of a mother. Before Mary's eyes flashed the perils of long, lonely marches in a country infested with Indians—a country where a man might be lost a thousand times over to die of hunger and thirst—might be destroyed by evil beasts or treacherous enemies; and the poor mother-heart cried out at the dangers that he must run.

"Oh, George, it is a life of peril and privation! Must you go, my dearest? Is there nothing else?"

"Madam," he replied, quite unmoved by her outburst, "peril and privation are accidents which may meet a man everywhere except in heaven—or the nursery. Having outgrown the one, and being as yet unfit for the other, I must accept such possibilities as the unfortunate inheritance of my sex. With your kind permission, I will set out next week for the West."

"I pray that the blessing of God go with you, my son," said Mary, bowing her head.

By tacit understanding George had seen little of Major Satterthwaite since that gentleman's interview with Mrs. Washington. The major realized that it would be showing small friendship for the lad to remind him of things which were definitely beyond his reach; and George, partly from the delicate loyalty which bound him not to go against his mother's wishes in any voluntary manner, partly from dread of useless pain, had stayed away. Now that his immediate future was decided upon, he felt at liberty to go and bid his soldier-friend farewell, but found to his disappointment

that the major was away in Williamsburg. He was touched to find, however, that he had not been forgotten. The servant in charge of Satterthwaite's rooms told him that a note had been left for him, in case he should call—a piece of forethought which surprised him when he remembered that he had not done so for quite eighteen months. He glanced round at the bare room with its few little trophies of arms on the wall, its three or four well-worn books of military science on the one table, its carefully dusted armchair beside which the servant had stood up the major's oldest top boots, apparently for company in his master's absence. As these familiar objects came one by one into his vision George remembered the golden dreams of glory which had revealed themselves to him here, and he felt suddenly lonely and unaccountably homesick for Satterthwaite's kindly, austere presence.

He sat down and read the note, thinking it might be wise to leave an answer there against the writer's return. It was inscribed on a leaf torn from a note-book, and one side of the paper was half filled with calculations jotted down in pencil, calculations equalizing the value of English and Flemish currency—probably a souvenir of payments made in the Dettingen campaign, since the major had not revisited Europe since that time.

This was what he had written to Augustine Washington's son :—

“MY DEAR GEORGE,

“I have heard of the Surveying Business, and think it most Sensible of you to Take it up. Am obliged to leave Fredericksburg for a Few Weeks, and have no Courage to seek you under Madam Washington's Accusing eyes; therefore leave this, Since am certain you Will come Before your departure. Having spent Many unprofitable Years in this topsy-turvy Polity called Life, am anxious to Give you the Result of long Experience. Learn French enough to Understand This Saying, *Partie remise n'est point perdue*. Chain measure and Plumb Line are Borrowing your Hand at this Present, but may not Everlastingly employ it to the Exclusion of Nobler Weapons. Also the former Instruments are notable good Servants of the Latter, and Familiarity with them Hath often been the Preparer of a Victory. Dear lad, I feel as if I were but Lending thee to this Obscure service, though I'm dem'd if I can see by what Door 'twill return thee to me and the King. Meanwhile thou hast acted most fitting and Gentlemanlike, and I am Proud to be thy Friend to command.

“JEAN-MARIE GUADALBERT BARTRAM-SATTERTHWAITE.”

The writing was painfully angular; the mediæval, Catholic names were puzzling and inappropriate, and conveyed no meaning to George's mind; but the staunch, supporting friendliness of the writer breathed in every line and comforted George's lonely young soul as nothing else except the presence of the man himself could have done. He slipped the note into his pocket, and rode home elated and cheered. More than once he looked at the French words, and made up his mind to find out their meaning. It must at least be as heartening as all the rest of the major's welcome little letter.

It was a mild March evening, and the country was most beautiful in its flowery greenness of early spring. It was long since George had felt so happy as he did now. It was a modest, sober content indeed, compared to the moments which had preceded his great disappointment, but it was irradiated at least by the fine light of liberty which was now shed on his life. A man at last—a man's work before him—dependence and submission things of the past, his heart was singing within him as he rode back to Pine Grove in the odorous May twilight, his horse's hoofs and the jingle of bit and spur the only sounds which broke the stillness of the road. He had to come some way down the river bank before he could cross the stream on a clumsy, floating bridge of rafts which opened for passing vessels and closed again for foot passengers and riders. His horse was accustomed to the queer arrangement, and stepped daintily across, expecting to have a good gallop round to his stable on the other side. But George was in no hurry to reach home to-night, and reined in the animal to a slower pace than usual—to enjoy the lovely prospect and think his happy thoughts in peace. Before him the landscape rolled away in soft gradations of field and forest laced with silver streams, till it rose in the West to the sapphire peaks of the Blue Ridge—the horizon of his world till now. The rosy sky was melting into amethyst haze behind them, and soon the country on this eastern side had lost its green and gold, and lay as if asleep under a delicate vale of twilight grey; but beyond the mountains some after-flush of the departing sun transfused the blue and violet of the sky with a sudden glow of ethereal crimson, paling into rose and gold ere it merged with the stars in the infinite depths of the firmament above. Out there in the wild hill-land of the west, amongst the high-towering plateaus and glorious forests of the Appalachian highlands lay George's work; and the virgin, unexplored country called to all the youth and joy of the young blood, and found glad answer to its call.

When at last he reached home his servant came running down the avenue to meet him with the news that Mrs. Washington had visitors, and had been asking for him. He threw the reins to Billy, leapt to the ground, and came striding into the hall in boots and riding cloak, his whip in his hand. A group was sitting there in the twilight, and in a moment old Captain Jones had risen from a deep chair and was coming towards him with outstretched hands and hearty greeting.

The captain had grown old in these last years; his joints were a little stiff, his face more deeply lined and more palely brown than of yore. But his eyes were as bright as ever, and he seemed all the more seaworthy for his many years of fellowship with salt sea winds and waves. He came less often now, since Mary had converted much of her tobacco land to the use of less delicate crops which paid quickly and well. But Captain Jones was always a welcome visitor in the Washington home, and, since Augustine's death, had treated young George with marked deference as the head of the family at Pine Grove—a compliment not lost on the sensitive feelings of the boy.

"Bless me, Mr. George," cried the captain, "you've been growing like a young tree! You overtop me now by a span! How are you, sir? I've brought Madam Washington some new friends from the old country, most particular recommended to my care and hers by your honoured uncle, Mr. Ball."

Then George, glancing over the old sailor's head, saw that the group in the twilight at the far end of the hall consisted of a lady and gentleman, standing one on either side of Mrs. Washington. Captain Jones led him forward, and he found himself confronting a brown, wizened old man dressed in some foreign uniform, and a tall, dark-eyed woman, slender and pale, enveloped in a travelling cloak, with a fold of crimson lining showing out sharp and making the only bit of colour discernible in the dusk.

"Permit me to present my son," murmured Mrs. Washington. "George, make your bow to Admiral de Kerensee and his niece, Mrs. McClintock, friends of your Uncle Joseph."

Now the very name, "Uncle Joseph," was an offence to George's ears. He considered it the name of a man who had enviously and spitefully spoilt a destiny too fine for his merchant soul to compass. But he bowed to the withered Admiral, and bent over the lady's extended hand with the grace of his infallible training. Then he drew himself up, and looked at them and at his mother with the flash of a question in his eyes. Was his evil star so far in the ascendant that Uncle Joseph had found some satanic means

of interfering with his purposes again? He could believe anything of the detested old fellow. But it would take more than a message from Uncle Joseph to keep him from setting out for the Blue Ridge to-morrow.

Perhaps Mary divined what was passing in his mind. At any rate, her first words removed his fears.

"It is indeed fortunate for my son, Madam," she said to Mrs. McClintock, "that we have the honour of receiving this esteemed visit to-night, for he is leaving home to-morrow to be absent for some time."

Mrs. McClintock looked kindly at the handsome youth, and her uncle made haste to answer for her. "That is a great loss to us, madam, but you must permit us poor strangers to do what we can to distract your maternal heart from the anguish of such a parting."

He spoke with a strange foreign accent, and bowed to the owner of the maternal heart with a grand self-possession which appeared to promise her royal compensation for small privation.

George was immensely amused. He and his mother were not accustomed to allude to their feelings, even in private, and, after Mary's first words to him on the subject, the matter of his journey had been regarded from the most business-like point of view.

"You are very kind, sir," said Mary, quietly, as if to dismiss the subject.

But the old Frenchman prided himself upon the sensibility of his feelings, and had several pretty phrases still in store for his hostess.

"Ah, madam," he cried, with an inimitable gesture of sorrow and compassion, "what heart would not grieve at witnessing the separation of such a mother and such a son? You are noble, spartan, he heroic, ardent! Doubtless he enters the army? Oh, I see it in your face! What a prospect for a parent's affection! Battles, privations, dangers—*mon dieu*, madam, but you are a very Cornelia! You would scorn to move him with weak prayers—nay, you give him to his country without a tear, without a sigh?" And the admiral flourished his handkerchief and put it to his eyes. The gesture was the drop-curtain on the sympathy scene.

Mary's face was a study of self-control. George, forgiving the past, had great ado not to laugh outright. Old Captain Jones, well posted by countryside gossip in the family history, fairly danced with vexation, and began to beat a tattoo on the table to keep his hands off the dramatic Frenchman. It was Elizabeth McClintock whose sense of delicacy relieved the situation. In a

voice of curious, ghostly sweetness, she said, "*Mon Oncle*, let us speak no more of such things. We should indeed withdraw, having arrived, I fear, at an inopportune moment." She looked at Mary with gentle deprecation after this speech, which was delivered slowly, as if each word cost some effort.

Mary caught at the diversion gladly. "Indeed, Madam," she said, "your visit is most welcome, and I could not let you and your respected uncle think of leaving us. You must both be much fatigued after your journey. Will you permit me to show you to an apartment where you can refresh yourself before supper?" She turned to her son, saying, "George, will you do the same for the admiral?" and then, taking Mrs. McClintock's hand, she led her away, thankful to escape from the dangerous old gentleman, who seemed a little chagrined at the absence of any applause after his eloquent effort.

George gladly took charge of the orator. Merely saying to Captain Jones with a nod of amused understanding: "Make yourself at home, captain, I'll be with you in a moment!" he led the old gentleman away to a room always prepared for a passing guest, had his great portmanteaus disposed there, and did everything for his immediate comfort, including the summoning of his own negro valet, Billy, to wait upon him. Then he came downstairs, three steps at a time, and, pouncing upon Captain Jones who had just reached his second glass of spirits, summoned him on pain of death or drought to tell all he knew about the strange guests.

"Lud, Mr. George," said the captain, "they've been a three months' surprise to me! Since the day I left London, when Mr. Ball came and handed 'em over to me, labelled 'Pine Grove, Stafford County,' till now, that old sea-pope—he talks as if he had the jurisdiction of five—has kept me hopping with surprise. He's got yarns that would put a smile on a corpse—and some that have a deal too much to do with dead men and their ways to suit me at sea! Guess he'll tell you some! They're all right on shore—I ain't queazy 'bout things that *walk*—it's their proper quarter-deck an' I guess it's broad enough in the beam for them an' me—but when it comes to them that *swims* an' follows a ship for miles, bobbing up and down an' calling your hands overboard—why, 'tain't healthy talk, Mr. George, an' I don't countenance it! But stop him? My—you might as well talk of stopping the Gulf Stream! I've had 'bout enough!" and the captain dipped his nose in an empty tumbler and set it down fiercely on the table.

"Oh no, you haven't, Captain Jones," said George, referring to the tumbler and filling it promptly, "I fear I shall have no time to hear much about the admiral's bogies, since I am going away to-morrow; but who is he, and why has he come here? And what have he and the lady to do with my uncle?"

"Well," replied the Captain, "I don't think Mr. Ball knew them at all till lately, but it seems that the lady's husband (she is a widow, Mr. George) was a great friend of your uncle's. He, the husband, I mean, died some years ago now in Edinburgh, where they were living. She mourned his death very obstinately, Mr. Ball informed me, and the admiral, her only relative, took fright for her reason and tried to induce her to travel to forget her woes—he is a kind-hearted old fellow, for all his ridiculous speeches. But she would not leave her home. I take it she has been always a somewhat fanciful person, though at sea I confess I saw nothing of that in her. But her uncle told me a strange tale of her never having been able to speak till shortly before her husband's death—you noticed how unhuman her voice doth sound? Be that as it may, when the troubles broke out in Scotland, the admiral took her to France, his own country, and then was towed back to England again and fell in with Mr. Ball, whose accounts of America so interested and diverted Mrs. McClintock that the admiral bethought him of a kinsman of his who holds some jurisdiction in the French district above the Ohio—or on the Ohio, I should say, seeing that the removing of another man's buoy doth not count as robbery with these demned foreigners."

"The Ohio is ours!" said George, proudly, "they would never dare to advance into our country!"

"'Tis a far cry from here to the Ohio!" replied the captain, "and doubtless they think we'll not miss the bit of land they've had the impudence to build some forts upon! 'Tis a quality of which Mossoo has the monopoly, you know!"

"We'll teach him better manners!" growled George, "but surely that decrepit old man and that poor lady are never going to try and reach the Ohio! He'll die before he has crossed fifty miles of that awful four hundred, and she, poor thing, will neither find her way there nor back again! 'Tis certain death!" And an expression of consternation at the probable fate of the wanderers chased away the scorn which had been showing itself at the methods of their nation.

"Well, it is no concern of ours, Mr. George, is it?" remarked the old sailor, cheerfully. "I've done my duty by 'em in handing

them over to your respected mamma, and if they choose to leave such handsome good company to go mooning across the desert after Mr. St. Pierre, I can't say as they don't deserve their fate ! Now, I'd better be getting back to my ship—I've christened her the *Fortuna* after the old one that went to pieces on the Banks—the one that Mr. and Mrs. Washington took their wedding journey on, Mr. George, when you wasn't even thought of, young man ! I tell you I could ha' cried when I lost her ! This is a bigger ship and a clipper to go, but I don't love her same as I did her elder sister. That one was like a child to me. Why, time and again I said to your respected papa——” But the little speech about *Fortuna* the first's perfections—a speech young George knew by heart—was not repeated this time, the conversation being interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Washington, who, of course, would hear nothing of Captain Jones's departure. He must stay the night, as he always did, she declared ; and then she reminded him, with a rather sad little smile, of his promise, given on the day of her arrival at Wakefield, to accept her invitations as long as he lived.

“ Proud and honoured Mrs. Washington, ma'am ! ” he replied. “ If I'm not in the way, I'd be glad to have this chance of seeing Mr. George before he leaves. We came in the nick of time, it seems. He says 'tis manslaughter to let Admiral Frenchy—I can't get the hang of his name yet—carry his niece over the desert, but the young gentleman thinks somebody ought to go and pay a visit to those pirate forts, I can see ! ”

“ George is not going so far as that, this time ! ” replied Mary, as if the idea were too absurd to raise apprehension in any reasonable mind. Then she went to call her guests to supper, and very soon the party was gathered round the big table in the dining-room. Mrs. McClintock's eyes lighted up with admiration and envy as Betty and her younger brothers came in, made their little bows and obeisances, and quietly took their places at the end of the board, their own servants standing behind their chairs. It was the first glimpse of colonial life that Elizabeth had obtained, and it struck her as artistically dignified and harmonious. The admiral swelled with delight. This array of scarlet-coated servants appealed to his taste for splendour. The Washington boys, with their high-bred faces and charming manners, might have been princes of the blood ; and Betty, laced into her best frock of blue silk, with square open neck and sleeves delicately ruffled, her hair raised high on her pretty head, ornamented with her favourite pink bow and a fresh rose, called forth a stream of voluble com-

pliments from the young-hearted old gentleman. She blushed and smiled, and dropped her eyes, and then raised them and bestowed on the admiral a flashing glance of coquetry and amusement, at which John remarked to Samuel in a low voice, that it was a pity the visitors had not seen her ride her pony at the farmyard gate that morning—she looked moderate well then—but *now*!” The younger brothers were more proud of their sister’s daring than of her new fine lady ways, always put on with the cherished best frock.

Mary was not pleased that the young girl should be so openly noticed, and led the admiral to talk of things on the other side of the world.

“Ah, you have been in England, madame!” he said, pouring water into his glass of splendid old wine, to the great scandal of his hostess and her family, who had orthodox ideas on such subjects. “What a grand country, what charming women and superb men! I remember a Scotch milord who used to visit my niece. But of a gallantry, and a great manner! What was his name, Elizabeth? My head grows older than my heart.”

Mrs. McClintock turned her head and asked Betty some question about flowers. She had become a shade paler, and Mary felt an unexplained apprehension weighting the air.

“Elizabeth,” insisted the admiral, “answer me, *mon enfant*! What was his name, the handsome gentleman so tall and dark, who so admired your *beaux yeux*? He was a great man in the barbarous Scotland, was he not? Perhaps Madame Washington may have met him. *Allons*, try to remember!”

Then Elizabeth looked at her uncle reprovingly, and spoke in that dead, unresonant voice which seemed as impersonal, as unowned as an echo. “It would not interest madame. Besides, I have forgotten.”

“Then I must find it!” cried the admiral, covering his eyes with his hand as if in deep thought, and peeping at his niece between his fingers. The sly old dog had always suspected a slight romance in connection with the haughty peer; and now that good, prosy Sandy McClintock was gathered to his forefathers, Elizabeth’s uncle saw no offence to her wifely virtues in reminding her of a distinguished conquest.

“I have found!” he cried suddenly. “He was the Vicomte Drumardlie! Is it not I who have the good memory then? Surely Madame Washington did hear of him in England?”

“Madam, are you ill?” said George, half rising from his chair, and looking at his mother in dismay.

All the colour had left her face, and she was sitting rigid, her hands tightly clasped on the table, her eyes half closed.

"No," she said faintly, recalled to herself by his question. Then she looked up, and found Mrs. McClintock gazing at her with an expression of terrified comprehension mingled with some horror of reminiscence which told Mary of more heartrending memories than her own. To her the name had sounded like some awful verdict long delayed and now pronounced at last. Whatever there had been in her own life, of poignant regret, of trouble brought on others, even the very tragedy of her widowhood, all seemed spelt in that name. But now the catastrophe of another life revealed itself to her. The look of sick, passionate hatred which had come over Mrs. McClintock's face, suffusing its gentleness as some lurid conflagration leaps up and shuts out a moonlit sky, lighted up for Mary the darkness of a long-forgotten puzzle. The wand of circumstance suddenly touched the pieces with magic power; the little pawns of the long-abandoned game sorted themselves before her eyes, events never understood before proclaimed their meaning, and the tragedy with the identity of all its actors was made clear.

McClintock's letter to Joseph, the crime of basest ingratitude and cruelty of which it spoke, a crime unfit to be related to a pure maid's ears—all was explained now. Elizabeth McClintock had been its victim, McClean its perpetrator. As Mary realized this, she pitied that other pale widow as she had rarely pitied any human creature in her life. But being what she was, it was inevitable that she should look down too, from the heights of her own immaculate wifehood, with something like scorn on the weakness of a woman who could be caught in such a snare.

Now, George, full of tenderness for the mother he was so soon to leave, came and stood behind her chair, terribly disturbed at her evident indisposition. He was the only man of the family, and a sudden doubt as to whether he ought to leave her had come into his mind. In her every-day strength he had forgotten that she was a woman after all.

"Dearest madam," he said, bending down and speaking low but, with real emotion, "I am sure you are not well! Let me take you to your room. Our guests will excuse you."

Mary looked up into his wonderful face, so like Augustine's now, in its tender love and concern for her. Ah, she was very rich, very strong, very worshipful still, with her glorious boy to lean upon! She smiled at him as she had not smiled since his father died. "No, my dearest," she said, "there is nought amiss

with me, nor will be while I have my dear son! But we will take the children into the other room now, and leave you gentlemen to your wine."

He stood ready to draw back her chair. She bowed to Mrs. McClintock. John sprang to open the door for the ladies, who went out, followed by Betty and the other children. When the door had closed on the procession, George called for fresh glasses, and standing up, proposed the health of the king.

The admiral lost much of his animation when there were no longer any ladies to listen to him; but George and Captain Jones drew him out skilfully, and before they all separated for the night, George had found out the meaning of Major Satterthwaite's words, "*Partie remise n'est point perdue.*"

The admiral, indeed, offered to teach him French in a fortnight, saying that since it was acknowledged to be the natural language of all *âmes d'élite* his young host would learn it with the greatest ease. George thanked him politely, reflecting rather grimly that the language most useful to him in a fortnight's time would probably be Apache Indian, failing which he would have to reply to those who spoke it by the monosyllabic remarks of a horse pistol.

When George rode away the next day, after profuse apologies to his mother's guests for not being able to postpone his journey, he was followed by a couple of mounted servants carrying his instruments, book, and baggage, and accompanied by his favourite brother, John, four years younger than himself and his devoted admirer. Mary bade him farewell calmly, recommending him to the protection of heaven, and only asking him not to expose himself to unnecessary risks, and not to leave her without news of him longer than he could help. Betty had cried herself stupid over the parting with him, and five minutes before he left, put on his hat and riding cloak and strutted up and down the verandah giving orders, air and tone so inimitably caricatured on his own, that the two youngest boys stayed their sobs to relapse into hysterical laughter. Mrs. McClintock tactfully remained invisible, but the admiral was quite a prominent person in the parting scene, taking farewell of the traveller with a fatherly blessing and many exhortations not to give way to grief. George was conscious of nothing, no grief at all, but was possessed by a great anxiety as to whether his instruments were sufficiently well packed to sustain no danger from jolting, and whether, with all the polite delays he should be able to reach his first stopping-place, a manor

belonging to his employer, and some fifty miles distant, before dusk.

At last he got away, and looked back at the turn in the avenue to wave his hand to the group on the porch, a group of which his mother was the centre, with Betty and the little boys clinging to her while she looked over their heads to smile and wave her hand to George in reply to his farewell gesture. The admiral had been standing near, to intervene should she faint, as a Spartan mother of any elegance might be expected to do, after the grief of parting. He had an old vinaigrette of mouldy smelling salts ready in his hand to apply to her nose when she should sink back into his arms. Whether the gallant old gentleman could have supported her stately weight was doubtful, but he was much disappointed when she turned round and met his anxious gaze with a well-considered suggestion for his day's amusement. Would he and Mrs. McClintock like to take a drive along the river banks? The morning was lovely, and the scenery held to be remarkably fine!

George, riding on with John by his side, felt mercurially happy. They had not long left home when some one came pounding up at a great pace behind them. Out of a cloud of dust appeared the face and figure of Hector McClean, waving his arm to the riders to stop and wait for him. As they wheeled their horses he met them and pulled up his own steed, a splendid four-year-old of glossy black. Hector had continued to pay intermittent visits to Pine Grove after its master's death, and Mary had become accustomed to seeing him arrive suddenly with Ian's compliments and some little offering for the children or herself. Ian never came, but one of the few impressions that remained to Mrs. Washington of the dreadful day of Augustine's funeral, was that of a glimpse she had caught of both brothers standing outside the circle of relations, with bowed heads and the demeanour of sincere and respectful grief. Once, a year later, on visiting her husband's grave, she found a wreath of withered Scotch heather, tied with a bit of tartan ribbon, lying at the foot of the mound. The McCleans had lost a good friend in Augustine Washington.

"They told me you were awa' the morn!" cried Hector, "and it's to-day you're flitting, Mr. George! I would not have had you go without bidding you God-speed, man, no, not for a thousand pounds! Why did ye no' send me word? I'd have been over to the house to see you yesterday!"

"Why, this is very good of you, Hector," exclaimed George, reaching out to take the other's hand. "I am sorry I did not

come to say farewell. I did not think you'd care!" George had flushed a little with pleasure at the evidence of friendship. He was always surprised to find that he was considered worth singling out for it.

"Care!" cried Hector, with fine scorn, "who should care more than I, and that most deeply, sir? Have ye counted the kindnesses I've had from you and yours? Mr. Washington was our first friend in this country—though a less generous man might have thought he had little cause to call us that! See," and he pulled a leather-covered bottle and a battered silver beaker from his holster, "my brother sends you his service and a stirrup cup, and I have put to it my old mug that you may remember me when you drink! Good Scotch whiskey, sir, that you'll be glad of when you get up yonder." And Hector nodded towards the distant mountains, all hazy blue in the warm March sunshine.

He rode on with the traveller a little way, and only left him when George told John that they must part now. Poor John's face fell, and his lip twitched a little, for he was but eleven years old, and had far less self-restraint than his elder.

George clapped him on the shoulder. "Cheer up, Jack," he said; "you're the eldest left at home now that Samuel is away, and our mother'll be expecting great things of you! Take care of her, and tell Betty and Charles not to break their necks or kill any of my fine horses before I get back. I don't want to find a row of cut knees in the stable neither! Will you see to it for me, Jack?"

"Of course I will," exclaimed the boy, cheered by this prospect of his deferred leadership. "When will you come back, George? For Christmas?"

"I cannot say, my man," said George hastily, for the definiteness of the break with his home suddenly presented itself to him, "but when I do come, I will bring you a whole box of wampum and hatchets and mocassins, I promise! Now, off you go, and Mr. Hector'll keep you company, won't you, Hector? Good-bye, good-bye, lads."

And he galloped away without once looking back.

CHAPTER III

THE hunter's moon was riding high and full, flooding the wide valley with misty silver, and throwing a tempered glory on the broad shoulders of the peaks on either side. Far below, the Shenandoah, loveliest of rivers, flowed with turn and race, and wimpled pool and gay cascade, over its mountain bed. To-night it seemed to have forgotten its heavenly parentage, for the "Daughter of the Stars," was all a tide of argent sheen, proud Dian's living mirror where her reflection drowned the pearl and diamond of trembling star rays in the smooth pulsing glory of her own silver light.

A delicate murmur was passing from tree to tree, where forests of spruce and hemlock flung out their dark arms from overhanging rock and smooth, shaded wall; here and there a buttress had spread to a tiny plateau high above the stream, and on it companies of sumach had rooted, interlacing their leaves of bronze and silver, their branches of dulled metallic fineness that looked as if ribbons of supple silver had been wound around them to shield them from the next winter's cold. The frost was on the wing from the unseen North, and the leaves had stiffened to meet it, and rustled against each other with crisp sharpness of sound. Some had fallen already, to be swept away in the river's rush, and the frost must have kissed them chilly in their sleep ere they fell, for daylight would show them in gold and scarlet flocks caught far down the valley in some eddying current that made tiny whirlpools, and kept such light jetsam for its own dalliance. The summer had died in a burst of glory, and sweet, sharp smells of balsam and sassafras and sturdy golden fern came wafting up on the wind of the stream.


To the north the peaks rose higher, and rocky curves shut away the earlier leaps and reaches of the Shenandoah, but towards the south the mountain barriers sank away on either side as if unwilling to hide its beauty; far as the eye could see there were stretches of silver water, light veils of silver mist catching on rock

and bough, the long silver arms of the obedient hills, and over all the throbbing silver of the infinite deeps of sky.

George Washington was sitting on a boulder by the door of his little hut, looking out on the beauty of the night with a sense of the fullness of peace around him. This spot had been the centre of his labours for some weeks past—he had hardly counted how many. It had been convenient, now that the autumn nights grew chill, to have a shelter wherein to sleep, and he had built himself a cabin of fresh-sawn logs of white pine, which gave out their fragrant aromatic smell as soon as the door was shut and the fire of cones and branches was crackling on the little hearth. Sleep is the most indulgent of friends anywhere in youth, but never before or after had George such enchanting dreams, such ineffably restful slumbers as in the pine wood, above the shanty perched on a grass-clad eminence of rock above the Shenandoah.

He was alone to-night, for his assistants, one a half-breed and the other an indented servant of Lord Fairfax, had left him the day before to fetch provisions from a station some twenty miles distant. It was a mere handful of huts, which the fur-hunters were wont to use as a starting-point for their expedition, and where an old man of some forgotten nationality kept stores of food and ammunition for sale. It represented George's only link with civilization; twenty or thirty miles further east was another such refuge, kept by a one-armed Frenchman who had married an Indian squaw. From this place another habitation would be reached by a long day's journeying towards the south-east, and so the little chain of outposts joined hands away and away, till the distance grew shorter, the houses more numerous, and the settlers were in touch with the living world at last.

It seemed to George that during the last two years he must have surveyed the larger portion of the globe. His work for Lord Fairfax had been concluded much sooner than he had expected, but it had proved to be but the preface to continuous work of the same kind for the Government. The first survey had been carried out so entirely to the satisfaction of the old peer that he had procured for his energetic young favourite the post of public surveyor; George had embraced it eagerly, and had now lived so long in Nature's most remote and beautiful places that the wilderness held neither secrets nor terrors for him. He had passed a whole winter in the fastnesses of mountain and forest and snow-buried plateau; he had tramped for weeks at a time through bitter cold, stopping every two or three hours to light a fire and thaw his freezing limbs. He had gone hungry for days when one of his



guides had treacherously robbed and deserted him, he had been lost, and guided himself back, exhausted and ragged, to human aid, by the help of the stars and his compass. Then he had sent an urgent appeal to Lord Fairfax to provide him with a reliable companion, feeling that life was too rich and promising to be uselessly flung away. After two months of anxious waiting he had been joined by the man Maverick, a convict rogue of a forger, under more than suspicion of murder as well, but a rogue who had shown a gentleman's loyalty to his young superior, serving him to the best of his bold ability. It was absolutely necessary for George's work that he should have a fairly intelligent man to hold his posts and chains, and answer to his signals over the bewildering tracts of upland and river, mountain and forest which were included in his survey. Then there had been adventures with Indians, friendly and otherwise. Mary Washington's darling had more than once stood in danger of being trapped and killed by silent red foes; but soon they had learnt to know and respect him; he had become familiar with some of their dialects, and word had flashed from tribe to tribe that the young white chief was a man of honour and kindness, who bore them no ill-will, and that he must not be robbed or molested in his mysterious labours. He had found a half-breed apparently dying, one summer night, far up in the hills. George had given him food and wine, and had laid him on his own blanket, whence the poor, starved creature had risen up, recovered, to devote himself to the person, godlike in his eyes, who had thought his life worth saving. Since that day things had gone better with George, for he had a guide upon whom he could rely, and a servitor versed in every resource of wild forest life.

When his work for the Government took him further east again, he had paid one or two flying visits to his home, but had spent more than one pleasant holiday with Lord Fairfax at Greenway Court, the lovely hunting lodge which had been built at his recommendation on the property which had been the matter of his first survey. A tie of the strongest affection existed between the eager, manly youth and the old nobleman, to whom George considered that he owed his start in a life of liberty and independence. The days at Greenway Court came as delightful interludes to hard work—there a thousand subjects were discussed which had nothing to do with surveying, and in which Lord Fairfax gave the young man the full benefit of his rich experience of men and things. There would be a day or two of fox-hunting, into which the elderly host entered quite as keenly as his young

guest, and then, George, rested, cheered, and refreshed, would fling away again for three or four months of the strange solitary work, which was pure joy in spite of all its hardships, because it meant independence and success. It seemed to be over now, and George knew not whether more employment of the same kind would be offered him. He had reserved this particular portion of his task for the late months of the summer, which had been divine in the breezy uplands—cool and warm at once, making it a joy to sleep out of doors at night, and tramp through the woods by day. It had been a wonderful experience, a very drinking at nature's wells for George in these glowing years of earliest manhood. He was bronzed beyond recognition, strong as a young oak tree, and as healthy in mind after this complete segregation from the littlenesses of the world as he was in body from the splendid liberty of his life in the open air. No young red-skin walked the wilds more lightly, bore fatigue more uncomplainingly, knew the ways of bird and beast and tree better than George, now in his eighteenth year, and realizing with regretful satisfaction that his task in this part of the State was all but completed, and that fate was beckoning him back to civilization.

He had spent this October day chiefly in the doorway of his hut, his papers spread on a rough table made of two upright logs and a bit of plank, copying out endless figures and notes into the precious folio which contained the result of his work, and which never left him. When night fell and he could write no more, he ate his simple meal of corncake and dried meat, and came out into the moonlight to smoke a pipe, and wait for the return of Maverick and Jasco, as the half-breed called himself. They would come soon now, with bags of meal and salt meats, a bottle or two of spirits, and perhaps, with luck, some letters from home. A post which had to travel by chance from hut to hut could not be counted upon with any sort of continuity; still it was four or five months since George had received his last batch of letters, and he knew that some must be on the way to him. Yes, it would be pleasant after all, to be at home once more, although he could never live there now. Liberty was a very sweet and familiar friend, and action was almost as dear. If he had to seek for a new occupation, where would he find one half so congenial as this?

He sat musing in the moonlight, his eyes dwelling with dreamy pleasure on the entrancing scene before him, and his thoughts travelling far over the Blue Ridge, to his home in the East. It was now fifteen months since he had been there. Would he

find things much changed, he wondered? Betty would be a fine young lady by this time, with looped skirts and powdered hair; the young brothers, always so clamorously joyful to hail their leader once more, would be great tall lads already; the dear mother, masterful, majestic, but so loving, had paid him all tender deference since he had taken upon himself the responsibilities of man's estate. Her eyes would light up proudly at sight of her son. One by one, George went over the litany of cherished home names; and after these, first among many friends, came that of Major Satterthwaite. Ah, George would be glad to see him again, with his shabby uniform and burnt boots (or had they been finally worn out and replaced at last?), with his huge sword and ugly medal and cross! For all he had never written, George knew that he would get a very warm welcome from the major.

And then out of the silence behind the hut, where the blazed path led away through the forest, came two noiseless figures—Maverick and Jasco, grotesquely loaded with parcels of forage, and looking ghostly enough in the moonlight.

George rose and came quickly to meet them. "Any letters, Maverick?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Maverick, swinging his pack off his back and letting it gently to the ground; "here they are, been a fortnight waiting at John's place." And he drew out a packet and handed it to George.

The young man took it eagerly, felt its comforting thickness under the leather cover, and put it into his pocket. "Come in and get some food," he said; "I made it ready for you. You must both be hungry."

And he led the way into the hut, where the corncake was steaming on the iron pan, and the kettle singing over the fire.

"Thank you, sir," said Maverick; "it's very good of you. We got there late—had to wait a bit for John—he'd gone out hunting this morning, and I couldn't get at what I wanted till he came back, so we've not stopped to eat on the road."

"That was wrong," said George, "but you must make up for it now." Jasco had brought in the bundles, and was unpacking them in a corner.

"See the fine bottle, master," he said, holding up a great black flask. "Long time Master no drink so good! Open quick."

The order was to himself, and in a moment Jasco had uncorked the treasure, and poured out a measure of topaz-coloured

liquid into Hector McClean's silver cup, the companion of all George's wanderings.

"Thank you, Jasco," said the master; "I'll take it outside with me, while you and Maverick fall to."

He went back to his seat on the boulder, placed his drink carefully on the moss, forgot all about it, and took out and opened his precious packet of letters. There were five, and the broad moonbeams, in that high, clear air, gave him all the light he needed for the reading. He spread them out on the rock and looked at the superscriptions, tasting the pleasures of anticipation before going further. That large square one, so beautifully folded, tied and sealed, was from his mother; a large thin missive, on paper that had not quite lost its dainty scent, even after such rough travelling, was from Betty; the next bore Lawrence's handwriting, there was a five-cornered thing, considerably blotted, from brother Samuel, and the last was a delightful surprise, for it showed his name rewritten in huge, angular letters that might have been drawn with the point of a sword, so characteristic of Major Satterthwaite that George laughed gleefully as he held it up to examine it in the moonlight. He was glad to know that his old friend was in his old place, near enough to home to send his greeting out with the rest.

He opened his mother's letter first, carefully cutting the fastening with his penknife. He was as delicately methodical in all his ways as Mary herself.

"My dear Son," she wrote, "Although I trust that Soon after the Receiving of This present You will be Returning to Your Family I will nevertheless write such news as I imagine Can be of Interest to You. In the First Place I will Express my thanks for your last letter, arrived Two Days since and giving me Good news of Your Health and Spirits for which I do thank Heaven. If in past years, my dear George, I was womanishly Inclined to Panic, Fears for your Wellfare, the Circumstances by which Providence hath seen fit to mould your Occupations, have cured at any Rate, the outward Expression of a Disease, for which a Mother may plead some Extenuation in her affection for a Cherished and ever Dutiful Son. In Your safe return for a stay of some duration to us, I shall be repaid for past Apprehensions and Anxieties. I am also Well Satisfied with the Manner in which you have fulfilled your obligations. My Lord Fairfax did send me word, by your Brother Lawrence, that he had not anticipated that so young a man could by any means succeed so Vastly to his Liking in such an Arduous Undertaking. He was further kind enough to say

that such Papers as you had forwarded to him concerning his own Property did fill him with Pleasure and Amazement by exactness and Order, the which he'd not have Believ'd possible to Compass in Hard and Savage Surroundings where every Convenience to Such occupation must Be lacking. I relate these Kind expressions my Dear Son, not to fill your Thoughts with Empty Vanity for having succeeded in that which was But your Duty, seeing that you had sufficient confidence in Your Powers to induce you to Solicit the Office in which They have been Employ'd. No, Heaven hath protected you, for which Mercy you have Doubtless already given humble thanks, and the Rest is due to your Having Taken Advantage of a good education and good examples, which would, however, have further'd you Little without your adherence to the Good Principles which have ever been Instill'd into your Mind. But the most Modest Workman hath clear Right to the Meed of Praise measured by his Employers' Satisfaction, therefore I have thought Fit to tell you of my Lord Fairfax's kind Words.

"Now I will tell you of matters here. All has jigg'd well with the Land, for which I do thank God. We have had Fine crops and Propitious Weather. There are Seven Yearling Blooded Colts which you will find marvellous Strong Spirited Animals. I am now turning my mind To breeding more heavy horses for Farm Work, being somewhat Lacking in These. I have sold Two Riding Horses, my old grey, and Betty's mare (this Latter Too uncertain of Temper for a Lady on the Road), and have given your Sister a good Pacing Horse Sired by Ajax who hath now offspring well thought of in the Whole Country. Samuel is grown a fine young man, very Dutiful, as thank God, all my Children are, John and Charles still go To School, but I Tell them they have Been Longer There than you were and 'tis time they did Put so much Teaching to Better profit. Old Mr. Carter hath Return'd from the Grand Tour, bringing with him a granddaughter brought up in a French School poor Maid and so unaccustomed To our Ways that he Hath asked me to Over see her beginnings in our Society and let Her abide at Pine Grove for a Matter of Six months. I could not Refuse an old Friend but Like the Arrangement Little. 'T is well favour'd but Too Pert a moppet for Betty's Companionship, To my Thinking. Have had Trouble Already, Samuel being easily Influenced to Love and Writing passing Bad verses to Miss Carter when He should Be overseeing Work here and in other Places. Hope the Disease will quickly pass, But I look to Your Coming as the Best Cure,

for He does Love His brother more Sincerely than he yet loves any young lady.

"We have Felled some few Trees and planted a nursery of White Pines Beyond the grove on the slope of the hill. Lawrence and Anne have just gone home after a seven nights' visit. He saith our High Air doth good to his health, but I fear he is not strong. It grieves me and his dear Wife much. She is a sweet young Woman. My dear George, I cannot Express the Joy I shall feel On your Return. You were ever the Best of Sons, and Success and Happiness should be the Reward in Store for you. I have done all in my Power to Increase the Value of your Inheritance and Hope it will prove a Fine Aid to your Own exertions to Establish you in such a Position as Your Father would have Wished.

"May the blessing of God be with you, my dear George, is the Constant Prayer of Your Loving Mother,

"MARY WASHINGTON."

His mother's phrases of sober eulogy caused George to glow with pride. He knew what real joy there must have been in her heart when she heard Lord Fairfax's message, and he was touched at the pains she had taken to convey it to him at once. He was aware that he had succeeded moderately well, but it was heartening to hear of Lord Fairfax's satisfaction—rapped out for certain with many a cheerful expletive to the sympathizing Lawrence. Now for Betty's letter. George smiled as he broke the seal. There would be no dignified phrases here, he knew. It began conventionally enough.

"DEAREST BROTHER,

"I take up my Pen with All Proper Sentiments and the desire to convey them, But that Same Pen is so consumedly bad that I think Sam must have been Using it on a copy of Verses Than Which you never perpetrated Worse and Teresa Screaming With Unseemly laughter over them This moment. She is mighty pretty and hath taught young Delia to do my hair French fashion which my Cousins Thornton weep over and can't copy. We are all very well. Mamma has at last permitted me to Have a quilt of Blue satin and Her wedding gown for a Frock looped over. I went to a Dance in It and Won't tell you all The Compliments I had. Teresa's Waist is very long and small, and I am going Hungry so as to get mine like unto it. Teresa makes me Talk much of you, and says you must Be a very Handsome Fine Man if What I say is True. I told her you Were so Fortunate as to

look like me, Whence her high opinion of course. My Mamma does say Teresa is putting Silly Thoughts in my Head. God knows there's Room and to Spare For 'tis empty enough. Cousin Sally Carter is grown monstrous stout and can't Ride more, Till she get a new Habit from London which won't be yet Awhile. At her Age too 'tis laughable. But she says she'll Ride to her own Funeral if she's ninety or not go at all. Anne has a sweet little girl. Lawrence a Bad cough. Charles and John are as great plagues as ever but Better than Samuel in his new condition. Teresa is looking over my Shoulder, so I will say she is a Meddlesome Maid with Mighty bad manners. When are you coming dear brother? Teresa——" (here something was crossed out with signs of a violent struggle, Miss Teresa having apparently got hold of the pen. Then the letter closed suddenly with these highly proper sentiments)—"Please forgive all my Silliness Heaven knows it hath nought to do with my Heart which prays That you may Have every Blessing and Prosperity, from your Affectionate Loving Sister,

"ELIZABETH."

"P.S. Do come soon. Mamma keeps Brushing your Fine clothes. Sam wants them saying you Have sure outgrown them and'll want new but Mamma lets him not.

"P.S. Mamma got a letter from Europe she liked not. I saw her crying, But would tell me nothing."

George smiled as he folded up the letter and laid it on his mother's. "'Tis Miss Teresa everywhere," he said to himself, "if I find her name in the next I'll have to hate or love her before I clap eyes on her. What has been troubling my mother, I wonder? Oh, some lamentations of Uncle Joseph over me, I'll wager. He has done enough and too much of harm already—'tis a pity she takes notice of his foolishness!"

The younger brother's letter was Teresa from beginning to end. Her loveliness, her wit, her kindness and cruelties, had filled poor Sam's mind to the exclusion of everything else. Even the horses were not mentioned. George shook his head in sober, elder-brother fashion over the youngster's ravings, and decided that it was a very good thing that he was going home. They seemed to want a man of sense among them.

Lawrence's letter repeated, in a few kind sentences, the report of Lord Fairfax's delight at the result of the Survey work, both for himself and the Government, and when it was read, George turned to Major Satterthwaite's epistle.

"Dear George," wrote the major, "Many will be glad of your Return, and I not the Least. I wish I had grown as much younger as you must have grown older since Last here. Have Wished you Luck unceasingly and Drunk your health in many companies. Have some new officers from Britain to our mess and wish you were one. My poor attainments being all military ones does tie my Hands which would gladly serve you but find no way now. Nevertheless Have not given up hope that such may be yours also in Time. A Young Gentleman Lieutenant Van Cortland does much admire your charming sister. But he is not good enough for her, nor in my opinion is her new Friend Miss Carter of whom dear Lad Beware. Your respected Mother, Madam Washington, hath kindly forgotten my Former Sins, and graciously invited me to her House, where I met the young lady. Such, when educated abroad, appear not at their Best among Persons accustomed to hold our nation in Proper respect and to damn all others, as Right thinking people to be good British subjects, must do. She hath English Blood, American Parentage, the Form of a naughty Goddess and French eyes, these Last of so Roving a nature That they did fix even on my Ugly Phiz with view to Conquest, me choking with mirth so that I lost a Button off my Tunic which Miss hangs round her neck on a Ribbon saying I gave it her, and then asks most impudent for my Cross to put on her lapdog says she, damn her. It is my Belief she waits here for thee, George, so be Warned. 'Tis for that I have Writ thee before thou Arrive. Nay but'll be right glad to see thee again George.

"Thy True Friend,
"JEAN-MARIE GUADALBERT BARTRAM-SATTERTHWAITE."

"The good soul," thought George, "It is the longest letter he ever wrote, I believe, and all for my salvation. What a name to have to subscribe to every epistle—all the letters in the alphabet almost to its spelling. This Miss Teresa seems to have been blown in on a whirlwind of mischief to set them all by the ears. Oh, they need have no fears for me! I have other matters more worthy my attention than ogling girls." But after these sensible reflections he fell to wondering whether he had forgotten his dancing, and, extending a mocassin-covered leg for inspection in the moonlight, began to calculate how soon the Fredericksburg tailor could supply him with a new suit of clothes after his arrival. The garments his mother was tending with such care would certainly fit him no longer.

CHAPTER IV

MARY WASHINGTON'S epistle to her son was written in September, two days after another letter, of a very different kind, had been put into her hands, with the one which she answered from George. Teresa Carter's disturbing presence had a little ruffled her inward peace, and Mary, after skilfully separating the intruder from her own brood for the day by sending her off to Fredericksburg with a friend, had gone to her own room to collect her thoughts before taking some decided step in the matter. The young girl's arrival had brought a disquieting element into the well-ordered family; Teresa was foreign, alluring, insincere, noticeably beautiful in some vaguely unholy way, and an open scoffer at law and order and all the virtues which the young Washingtons had been taught to admire. Already their mother found more difficulty in maintaining her wise discipline, and she regretted the promise given to Mr. Carter, who had been one of her earliest friends, and to whose request she had willingly consented before the object of it had been made known to her.

Now she felt that perhaps she had acted rashly, and was trying to find a plan by which, without failing in kindness to her old friend, she might transfer Miss Carter's disquieting personality to some other household of the clan where it would be carefully supervised and would have less opportunity of doing harm than at Pine Grove.

Mary paced her room, and thought, and found nothing. Sally was too careless, Anne too much occupied with her delicate husband and child, Mary's half-sisters were elderly women now, for whom such a charge would be too heavy; one cousin had young daughters, another growing sons who would fall an easy prey to this witch from over the water. There seemed no way out of the difficulty. Teresa must remain a little longer. Mary was sorry enough to come to this conclusion, and, as ever in perplexity,

drew her Bible towards her to read some comforting words. She had the old-fashioned superstition that the holy book, opened at a venture, would give her light and help. To-day as the leaves fell apart, the first text on which her eyes lighted was one which she must have read, but had never noticed before.

"Where are your ships of desire that ye sent to the land of spices and pearl?"

She sat gazing at the strange words which told of beauties, lusts, ambitions, so alien to her life. It was only in the pages of Holy Writ that she ever found these openings into the wonder-world of the past. What work of poetic imagination, of flame-winged human genius, ever presented such pictures, painted such visions before the seeing eye, as the half-forgotten prophetic Books of the Old Testament? To a woman like Mary—too busy to cast so much as a glance at general literature, had even the materialistic literature of her day had any attraction for her—her whole existence a round of sane and ordered occupations and duties, which were to-day, and would be to-morrow, the same that they had been for many a year—the marvellous, poetic picture-writing of the Bible was a treasure none the less inestimable for the unconsciousness with which she drank in its imaginative beauties while humbly seeking nothing but food for religious thought. From the opening chapters of Genesis, with their light on man and nature stealing adown the ages like the clear, even radiance of some great, fixed star, to the magnificent pœans of victory thundering through the Revelation of St. John the Divine, the Bible was Mary's book of books, as it has been to many a pure and lofty spirit so full-fed with the poetry of God that no desire is left to taste of that which springs from the mind of man.

Every element of humanity is there; love and hate, conflict and calm, triumph and defeat, passion of possession and threnody of despair—no chord which has ever thrilled our sentient dust since first it found a soul but rings full and true in that marvellous epitome of Divine and human history. Many a time had Mary, sweetest and sanest of women, escaped from the sadnesses and wearinesses of daily life since her bitter bereavement, by letting herself go to its holy power. Thence she had returned to the arena of toil with calm eyes and smiling lips, not weakened but strengthened by feeling her wings in the higher air. Her spirit had soared at last to a region of more ethereal light than had hovered over even her last earthly love. From Augustine's grave his Mary's soul had risen, slowly at first, through heavy clouds

and blinding darkness, but ever with faster and stronger flight, to tranquillity and home in the bosom of its God.

In her peaceful chamber, with windows open to rustling branches and warm, south winds, she sat before her old Bible, her hands clasped, and her eyes seeking Heaven's blue above the tree-tops. Her perplexities were forgotten already; her fair brow bore no traces of earth's vexations; it was kissed into pure patience by immutable Peace. Her eyes were deep and tender as the skies they reflected, and the mouth that had lost the warm, red curves of youth had taken on lines of immortal sweetness and fortitude, lines which promised that none but wise and holy words would ever come from its heaven-kept portal.

"Ships of desire?" she mused. "Ah, who has not sent them forth? Some, white-winged, steering for heavenly ports, some, lurid and dark, seeking the merchandise of earth and sin. Who were the ancient people, hot of blood and eager of splendour, who heard the prophet's cry, who had launched those ships of desire that never returned to port? What strange seas had swallowed up those shadowy mariners? Had they ever reached their "land of spices and pearl?"

Out of the mystic page there leapt to her a throb from the storied past, a flash of jewels on southern seas, a waft from dead sweetnesses, primal, strong, perilous, filtered down through the channels of ages to tinge the wine of life's to-day. The mariners had been God's people all, brothers and sisters of the great, human family, kindred dust long lost in cosmic changes, and Mary wondered if she should ever know more than the prophet had told of their quest.

Suddenly she rose to her feet and closed the Book; some one had knocked at the door. Now Betty's young voice was heard, saying, "Will it please you to open, madam? A letter has come for you."

Mary went to the door and opened it, and there stood Betty, smiling with the certainty of being a welcome messenger. She held both hands behind her back, her pretty head was cocked on one side, and her eyes were dancing with fun and joy.

"Which hand will my mamma have first?" she cried; "they are both full."

"The right, child," said Mary, entering into the girl's gay mood. Betty always made laughter appear the highest of virtues.

"Wise mamma!" she exclaimed, slowly drawing her hand from behind her, and holding out a travel-stained letter addressed in George's bald writing.

Mary took it joyfully. George's letters arrived less punctually than they were written, and it was long since she had received one.

"Now," said Betty, laughing, "I suppose I may keep the other for myself. Your Majesty won't be wanting to read any less august epistle, having received one from His Royal Highness Master George!"

"Is the other for you, my daughter? If 'tis from your brother, I'll not ask to see it, you know. Otherwise——" Mary smiled kindly at her tall, lovely girl. A very proper, maternal supervision was exercised over Betty's rare correspondence.

"'Tis not for me, ma'am, more's the pity," was the reply; "so thick and so far-travelled—it must be matter of great import, and no one has the good sense to confide such to me. There—'tis all for my dear, kind, beautiful mamma, as everything should be in the world."

And Betty flung her arms round her mother's neck, held off again, made a pretty curtsy, and at last handed to her a big, many-sealed letter, at sight of which Mary suddenly grew silent.

Charlie's voice was heard calling for his sister, and Betty danced away. Mary re-entered her room, closed the door, and laid the two packets down upon the old brown Bible. The letter from George lay side by side with that other addressed with elaborate care in a handwriting which George's mother had not seen since a day in England, after a great storm had been ravaging the Thames valley, three-and-twenty years before. She was too amazed to ask herself why she remembered it. All her senses were curiously alive to-day, and she felt as if she were being swept along without her own volition.

She picked the strange letter up suddenly, and threw it across the table. It must not touch the one from her boy. Then, steady and self-controlled once more, she opened this last. Its ringing phrases of youth and hope banished the turmoil from her spirit. When she finished reading it, and laid it down again beside the Bible, she was George's calm, gentle mother once more, a woman hedged in with lifelong loves and splendid decorum. She could read the other letter now.

Here is what Robin McClean wrote to Mary Washington—

"If there were one Title I could fitly Pronounce in addressing you it would be written in this Place. But there is none which you Receive from others which you would Permit me to Use. Wherefore my Cry cometh Unheralded By your Name. That

name hath called To me this many a Year, and now To my Thinking another is calling me, even my End, and ere I answer that I must Speak to you. From your fair Thoughts I did cast myself out, unworthy of such Royal harbouring. Even as a broken Wretch goeth from the Presence of his Judge, Sentence passed upon him and him who passed it seeing him no more, was I Driven out to meet fitting Doom. Yet seeing the Judge humane may by His own too good Conscience ask himself in after Time whether he did perform Justice only or did add Cruelty thereto (He Being but Persuaded and not inwardly certified—of the Writer's guilt) Is it not His Due that the same unhappy Sinner should by full confession assure him of the Rightness of his Deed? This come I with this Present to do—Before you, Mary, and when this is done, to ask of your Charity and grace, not for me, but mine.

“Now I Perceive that Here I have writ your name against my Will, but let it stand. There be those who look to it as a name of mercy for poor Sinners, and maybe it will not anger you even to see it Here, writ by one beside Whom Criminals should appear to be virtuous men, but to whom you said even in giving Sentence of Banishment: ‘Go in Peace and Sin no more.’ Mercy must needs be greater of Stature than the object to which it Inclines, therefore I pray you Use all That you can exercise in my Regard.

“Hearing from my kinsfolk in Virginia of your noble estate, of the exceeding High Honour in which your Virtues are held by all, of the fair family which hath the Happiness to call you mother, I humbly pray that this Present will be incapable of Bringing so much as a moment's Pain to your gentle Heart. I can almost Pray that the Recounting of a sad and bitter story will prove a Source of Consolation unto you, who Promised me the assistance of Heaven even while justly depriving me of your Own. How far that most gracious Promise hath found Celestial Endorsement you shall now judge. Such things are Too High for me.

“I am not old, yet I Ramble Diffusedly, Dreading to See on this Page the particulars of my Sins against such an one as Yourself. Yet now I will find Courage to speak of These. Verily as I have any even Faint Hope of escaping From the Chastisements of Hell, when I first did Behold you there Shone from you a Lustre which dazzled my Mind, and did, as it were, Sweep from it all Bonds, Ties, and Duties whatsoever, So that there Remained behind but one Command unbrooking of Divine or Human

Prohibitions, To get you for Myself. One who had lived in Prison Darkness came staggering out into the Light, and naught would stay the Madman from snatching at the Sun.

"Alas, I had been Companioned in my dungeon, and not alone could I leave It, although every Passion of my Covetous Heart cried on me to cut free and see those two no more, a Stolen Wife who was no wife though all men called her so, who had been Faithful to the Ravisher and would be Scorned of better men than he, if he cast her out—a Young Son, Born of unChurched wedlock, nine years called the Heir. These sat in Duart as their Rightful Home. Until I saw your Face, never a Thought had I but That such it was and should Be Forever.

"But you came, and they seemed Dust to be Blown away by a Breath. The Place they had usurped (for so I, who had brought them there, accused them) should be for you and yours. Then you would have none of me — more rightly than you dreamed, you turned from me—and I, refused of Heaven, made common cause with Hell. Have you I would. With secret rites of Blood and Shame I bartered the Soul of me for the hope of your fair body, and came once more to you, drunk with the Certainty that my new master would then make you mine. Dost remember, Mary? Oh, I have prayed to be Blind on autumn mornings, to forget! For the Space of a noonday heart-beat, while the shadows passed from east to west upon the grass, I believed you mine. Then you came to me, and sent me away, a man Ruined beyond Retrieving, alone, divided from Hope for ever. You said certain Words whose sense was not for me. Then, but long after, in Darkness and rain, They burnt through me to the Light. 'Live kind and true, Robin. I cannot help you, but God will.'

"I knew you had heard of all my Perjury, that you had learnt of Wife and Heir, unknowing even of the poor, thin quibble by which my Baseness meant to cast them out. Yet you, conversant with the angels, Bade me Repent and hope. Who was I to say nay to you who knew the mind of God? So, dimly and wearily, at last I Rose up to obey. The man died from whom I had ta'en awa' my poor Jean, and her I gave her Due of name and ring. The Child was Dead when I came to you the Second Time. Another, born of the hope to leave a good man where a Bad did Rule, Does honestly carry a name which, I fear, must sound offensive in your ears. Yet 'tis for him I would ask a grace that's forfeit for myself. Mary, of all women, you have most cause to hate and scorn me—my Sins would have dragged your

glorious head beside them in the Dust—will you, of your celestial Charity, stand friend to my poor Son?

"The Times are Evil here in Scotland for such as he; inheritances forfeited, friends slain or fled; my own End, as I feel, not far away; therefore I have sent the Lad to my Kinsmen, Ian and Hector, in Virginia. They tell me that one I am unworthy to name stood friend to Them after sad offence received, offence which lieth at my door, not Theirs. If this be the measure of mere man's generosity (though the man outshone his kind in Virtue and nobleness, I know), yours will not fall short of it, there being no Virtue nor nobility in this World which findeth not its natural place most pre-eminently in your pure Heart. The boy Robin is but Twelve years old, hath Better dispositions than his father. His mother died three years ago. His kinsmen will honestly and faithfully see to his Welfare, and the Virginian property will maintain him Fittingly far from these Vexed shores. But the day may come when he shall need a Wise and Powerful friend. Mary, set the Seal on your Forgiveness to me, of which by God's mercy I do not Doubt, and be that Friend to my Son.

"Your humble Servant while Life shall last,
"ROBIN MCCLEAN."

There are two classes of characters, equally estimable, pure, and wholesome, equally necessary to the world — those who know not, and those who know.

The first seem to plunge into life with entire and glorious unconsciousness of the laws which have surrounded and upheld man's existence from the moment of his creation till now. Each new event is an undreamed of surprise, each new effort a wielding of weapons never tried before. With the splendid carelessness of spiritual youth, they fling their whole armoury of vitality, self-confidence, and strength upon the deed of the moment; they have no yesterday and no to-morrow; to-day the sun shines full in their eyes, to-day they will rejoice, sorrow, love, suffer, fight, like spirits new-born this morning, whose course must be run ere night. To-day's success is unshadowed by foreboding, to-morrow's defeat will be definite despair, both a matter of stupendous surprise. They have not counted the victors before them, nor cast a glance at the slain. New souls, untinged by heredity, untrained by storied ancestry, they seem to have been thrown upon this world from some star whose light has but just reached us across the illimitable distance of space, and has

scarcely had time to class itself among the forces of our universe. These know not, and their ignorance is their strength.

But those who know are seers. To them, after the first few years of reasoning existence have passed, nothing comes singly ; that is to say, events are traced to their sources in the past, and are analysed as to their influence on the future even as they occur. Quietly and rationally such persons judge their own destinies as they would judge the destinies of others. "At such a time," say they, "I signed a bond, unwitnessed by men, but tangible and binding to me ; this new perplexity, or obligation, or joy, as it may be, is the logical sequence of my act. There were hidden clauses in the bond, but I should have thought to seek for them. They do not invalidate my affirmation thereof, and they must be carried out to the letter." These are the sadly wise, who know. Not for them are sudden heroisms, joyful leaps into the glories of self-sacrifice, the intoxications of martyred altruism. They have no illusions about themselves or their circumstances ; the first decision has made all the rest ; they know that cause can never be cheated of effect nor effect be bastardized from cause, that human life is governed from generation unto generation by the most stupendous and ruthless logic. They are little touched by Hope—its sweetness is too vague to weigh seriously in the great mathematical demonstration so clear to their eyes ; they are invulnerable to despair, seeing the further development of the problem beyond all temporal anguish. They can match their own bitter suffering from some standpoint of another dimension, and the sight does not soften a single pang of the human entity writhing in the dust while the clear-eyed spirit stands coldly by, waiting for the agony to pass. Neither may the fullness of trust in joy be theirs. They know that suns must set in night, that dearth shall follow on fullness, that change is the law of growth. Sad-eyed, solitary, patient, they wait for that of which they shall not be cheated, the vindications of Reason Eternal and Supreme.

Mary Washington was one of those who know. Events which, to those round her, appeared of the first magnitude, brought her no thrill of sudden joy or fear ; she was only surprised that others should be startled by what seemed so inevitable and certain. But when across the familiar harmony of every-day sights and sounds some new influence stole, some note, long unheard, sounded again, then Mary raised her head and watched and listened, asking herself what this thing might mean, whether it were hostile or friendly, holy or hateful. Watching life from her inner solitude in the strange,

impersonal detachment which was the only attitude possible to her since Augustine's death, two things had come together, like subtle yet recognizable portents of change, and these were Teresa's advent and Robin's letter. Teresa had introduced an element of alarm, of fantastic anxiety, into the fair, wholesome work and ways of Mary's home. It was impossible to forget her, dangerous to overlook her undesirable importance. Robin's revelation of the hideous danger which Mary had run in her happy youth—danger only escaped by her unhesitating obedience to her brother's commands—brought her such a shock as she might have felt on seeing some long-buried friend, sinning yet forgiven, rise from the grave to display the corruption of death before her eyes. Believing, as she did, that Augustine's life had paid the price of her passing hesitation, of her mistaken pity, she was too just to lay the blame for that anguish on any but herself. No resentment against Robin had been allowed to embitter a sad and terrible memory. Him she had long forgiven, and had prayed that he might turn from his evil ways (all undefined to her pure mind), and find mercy with God. The flashlight thrown on the past by Elizabeth McClintock's visit had made her shudder anew; but with all her delicate womanliness and divine charity, it was yet more possible to forgive a sin against another than one so black against herself, as that of which she now became aware for the first time. For this fact no human wisdom could have prepared her; it was brutally possible, undeniably true. Had she been so far untrue to her own instincts as to be entrapped into a marriage with McClean, she could never have counted herself his wife while that other poor woman lived. He would have done worse than murder to Jean and her son to make Mary his companion in the name that was rightfully theirs. Mary, the murdered widow, the noble mother of Augustine's children, felt such a flame of furious wrath at the thought of what Robin would have made her, that, had his life been in her hands at that moment, he would have met with short shrift indeed. It was only an hour later, in reading the letter again, as she obliged herself to do, that she even saw the other details of his confession. Then the anger died in horror of what she learnt. The man had already sold himself to the powers of darkness—with what hideous abandonment was but too evident—when he won from her that unwilling consent.

When she realized this, she fell on her knees and prayed, first that the sin committed for her sake might not be imputed to her and hers, and then that the sinner might be forgiven. And on the instant came her peace. Even before she had ended her simple,

heartfelt prayer, there came to her such a flood of inner light as had never visited her since her bereavement. What was this over which she was grieving and shuddering? Here was a poor soul returning to its God. Were not the angels in Heaven rejoicing even now over the man's repentance? "Rejoice thou, also, my child," the inner voice seemed to say, "his sin is pardoned. Suffer he must—but thou, faithful and patient daughter of thy God, have no fear. For thee he fell, and at thy command he rose. Thou hast asked for his salvation, and I have granted it thee because thou art very dear to Me."

After this it was not hard for Mary to resolve to befriend Robin's young son. Long before she saw the boy she classed him among those to whom she had a duty to perform, and her thoughts went towards him in kindness and pity. She would not seek him out. She was too wise to venture on precipitating circumstances, on distorting by haste a single line of the web that events rolled off the loom under the higher guidance to which she and hers were so trustfully committed. The boy would be brought to her in due time, and his welcome would be warm and sincere, whether he came to-day or ten years hence.

Three weeks later Hector brought him over to Pine Grove. It was a drowsy day of early September when the country lay, deep in crop and bloom, under a soft haze of heat. Everything seemed to be at the fullest glory of flower and colour. Creepers, white and scarlet and purple, waved from the lower branches of the trees, the grass by the roadside was powdered with the yellow aconite, while in the standing corn the blood-red poppies fluttered like flocks of scarlet butterflies caught on spears of gold. The enchanting perfume of sun-baked earth and sun-kissed wild flowers came wafting over hedge and lea, and when Hector and young Robin left the road to ride through skirting pine-woods, the grateful shade of the trees was permeated with the exquisite, pungent aroma of bursting cone and trickling gum and carpeting pine-needles, these last so thick underfoot that the horses' hoofs sank into them and padded along through the muffling sweetness with scarcely a sound to break the silence.

When the cousins emerged from the wood on the road again they mended their pace, and in a few minutes were at the gate of the Pine Grove plantation. A negro boy sprang up from the deep grass within and opened it for them.

"Missis over thar," he exclaimed, pointing vaguely in the direction of the house. "Guess you'll find her all right."

"Laddie," said Hector to Robin, after they had passed through

and were pacing up the avenue, "ye'll be minding your manners, and saying 'ma'am' when she speaks to ye. Madam Washington is the great leddy, ye ken."

The boy nodded silently, and a moment later they both dismounted and walked up to the porch, leading their horses. They had seen a lady rise from her seat at the further end and move forward to the steps to greet them.

Young Robin, standing below on the path, glanced up to behold a tall, stately woman looking down at him with an expression of great kindness tinged both by anxiety and pity. She was dressed in a full, flowing skirt of some black, woollen stuff; the close-fitting bodice was finished with a white kerchief of fine lawn, thrown over the shoulders and crossed on the bosom. A lawn cap with little frills to its edging rested on her hair, paling now from gold to grey like a cloud that the setting sun has left behind. Her eyes were sweet and wise, and on her lips was the smile of one who has long ceased to laugh.

And when Mary looked down on the new claimant for her friendship, she saw a lithe slender lad, tall for his age, with his father's features, soft still in the roundness of youth, and giving promise of strong feeling and little self-control. She had expected a dark-eyed, dark-haired boy. Robin the elder, Ian and Hector, were all of the old, true Celtic type. Young Robin had hair of red gold, like his mother's, rippling in tight waves and escaping from the great black bow which tied it at the back, in little rings like blown sunshine. His eyes were blue as the sea at midday beneath the cliffs of Mull.

"I have brought the chief's son, Madam Washington," said Hector, bowing over her hand. "Will you be as kind to him as you have been to his poor kinsmen? Robin, make your bow to Madam Washington."

"I am glad to see you—Robin," said Mary, hesitating a moment over the name. "Your cousin Hector is a good friend of my son's, and I hope you will be the same. Come and rest in the shade."

A servant took charge of the horses, and Hector and Robin followed Mrs. Washington to the northern side of the verandah, where chairs were set, and a great basket of work stood beside an old book on a table.

The boy was shy and unaccustomed to strangers, so Mary addressed her conversation to Hector, who felt for her the warm admiration of a young man for a kind and beautiful woman, too young to be his mother but old enough to inspire both confidence

and veneration. Hector was a simple, direct soul to whom life presented a never-ending panorama of happy interest. He could not find a flaw in it, so far. Mary always enjoyed listening to his cheerful, hopeful talk. All was going exceedingly well with Cray Manor and its guardians, and it gave her unfeigned pleasure to know it.

"I am sorry none of my boys are at home," she said at last, turning to Robin; "would you like to go and see the stables? I dare say Hector can tell you nearly as much about the horses as I could, and doubtless you love horses?"

"I do indeed, ma'am," said the boy, with brightening eyes. "I had more need of a boat than a horse in the Hielands, but here I'd like never to be out of the saddle." Then he flushed at having said so much.

"That is right," said Mary, "'tis the finest exercise in the world. Now do you and Hector stroll over to the stables, and by the time you return I trust my young people will do the same, and then you must both remain to supper." As the two walked away to the stables Mrs. Washington stood and looked after them for a moment.

"Out of the past—into the future," she murmured; "another link, another duty. God's will be done."

Later Betty came in from the garden with her hands full of flowers, and Teresa returned from a visit to a neighbour, who had been keeping her out of mischief all day. Both were delighted to find that they were to have guests at supper. Samuel, a fine young fellow now, entered just before the meal was served, and whispered to Betty, "Keep the seat by Teresa for me, sister!" Perhaps she did not hear, for at that moment the two younger boys made a noisy irruption into the room and were sent off to wash their hands and get rid of their dirty boots. When Samuel came to claim his place it was already filled by young Robin. Teresa looked up at Sam with an arch smile.

"Too late, Mr. Samuel!" she cried, "your place is taken by a younger and prettier gentleman!"

Robin half rose, as if to give up his seat. But Teresa laid her hand on his with a detaining grasp. The touch of her fine, warm fingers sent a flush to his cheeks. "Sit still, my dear," she whispered, "I'll have no cavalier but you to-night!" Then she glanced saucily at Hector, upon whom she had tried many wiles in vain. He took no notice of her, having eyes for no one except Mrs. Washington. Samuel moved sulkily to the empty chair beside Betty, and Robin sank down in his place with his brain in

a whirl. Teresa drew his hand towards her under the table and smiled into his eyes. "We must be good friends, Robin," she murmured; "God knows I have few enough."

"I'll be one, though," he replied, feeling suddenly ten years older as he looked into the face of the first beautiful girl who had ever taken notice of him. The time was still to come when he would seek to forget it if the forgetting cost life itself.

Mary glanced quickly across the table. "Robin," she said, in the clear, low voice which always seemed to command attention, "my sons are anxious to know which of the colts you most admired! Was it the black or the sorrel?"

"Oh, the black, ma'am," he replied, becoming instantly a boy again, and delighted that his opinion should be thought of any value; "he is a perfect beauty, and Hector thinks so too!"

In her dealings with Teresa, Mary learnt almost as much of the undesirable side of feminine human nature as McClean's letter had revealed to her of the masculine aspects of wickedness. In constantly overseeing the girl's intercourse with Betty, in trying to laugh or reason Samuel out of his infatuation and in discounting the effect of Teresa's careless example on the younger boys, she was obliged to sacrifice much precious time. Mr. Carter was away in New York, and Teresa must remain till his return towards the end of the year. Till then no change was possible, much as her reluctant hostess desired it. Mary felt deeply sorry for the motherless maid starting in life with so many moral disadvantages, such dangerously attractive charms; she did her best to lead her into safer paths, by gentle talks, by wise advice, by ready sympathy on subjects where sympathy was possible, but she felt that she made no way with the young girl. Teresa had no use for friends, for advisers, for protectors. At this period of her life she was consumed by one ruling passion, vanity and love of conquest. There were worse sides to her wayward nature which might make themselves felt in later years, but none would be so fraught with danger to herself and those around her. Noting the contrast between Betty's sunny unselfishness, her happy unconscious beauty, and Teresa's hungry seeking for admiration at any price (an avidity which made her blind and deaf to social and domestic claims), Mary sometimes feared that she might be committing the greatest mistake in supporting Teresa's presence for a day longer. But that presence only seemed to draw Betty closer to her adored mother, to make her more anxious to nestle under the maternal wings which had been her safeguard all her life. In

spite of Teresa's pouting remonstrances at having no companion to share her room, Mary still kept Betty's white bed in her own chamber ; and during the day she retained her daughter closely at her side, through all the varied tasks which the ladies of the time thought it right to perform themselves for their households.

The prospect of George's return to spend Christmas at Pine Grove would have added to Mary's anxiety, but that it was bound to coincide very nearly with Mr. Carter's home-coming. Mary hoped that the latter would precede it, and that her hot-blooded George, ever ready to fall in love with a pretty face, would not be thrown into Teresa's society at all. Nevertheless, the risk existed, and so in writing to him she thought it right to give him her opinion of the young girl pretty frankly. She was troubled about Samuel, but fancied that she already saw signs of his disillusionment. Teresa's complete forgetfulness of him as soon as some other man appeared, must act as a healthy tonic to such a spirited and honest lad.

Things were in this condition when George came home in the middle of December. Mary had just had a letter from Mr. Carter, in which he told her that he would be in Fredericksburg in ten days' time.

CHAPTER V

CHRISTMAS and the hush of the snow had fallen together on the country, the snow so deep and thick that a great party of young people had left Pine Grove in sleighs to make a day of it among the foot-hills towards the west. In the bright morning sunshine they had skimmed over the roads, much happy laughter mingling with the sleigh-bells' music, for rarely was such a treat vouchsafed in that mild climate. A three days' fall, followed by sunshine and frost, was a thing rarely experienced there, and too good not to be enjoyed to the full. Over the sparkling surfaces the light sleighs flew, a man and a maid to each, he driving, she wrapped in furs, all glowing with youth and its unquenchable fires. Some thirty miles from home, on the edge of a rising pine wood, they had made a mimic camp, the boys gathered sticks and cones, the girls lighted the fires and boiled the kettles and cooked their cakes in laughing rivalry, and then had come the open-air meal, enjoyed as only young people can enjoy such things, destined to remain enchanting memories for ever.

As the air grew mellow with hours of sunshine, the groups had separated, wandering in couples through the young woods, telling stories, making love in light-hearted fashion, the girls gathering the smallest of the pine-cones, as woodland trophies to be carried home for pretty winter work, the men vowing that the senseless brown things were favoured beyond their deserts when carried in a loop of furred cloak-end over a soft, round arm.

Then the leaders of the party, warned by the red sunset light and the raw chill in the air, had sounded a long, shrill whistle to call the wanderers back. Some, the more timid, had come eagerly, unwilling to be left in the shadowy places after the rest had started for home; but others, who feared nothing side by side, dallied a little, and came unwillingly at the last. One couple came not all.

"Are we all here?" cried Samuel Washington, trying to count heads. He had enjoyed himself less than the others, poor boy, his goddess having thrown him over and attached herself to his not unwilling elder brother at the last moment.

"All, I think, Sam," answered Betty, looking like a rose in her soft furs. "Come, Mr. Van Cortlandt, we'll lead the way and race the rest home."

Young Van Cortlandt, just now Betty's ardent admirer, took her at her word, lifted her into the sleigh, tucked the buffalo robe round her dainty feet, and sprang to his place at her side. He was a slight, boyish-looking young fellow, with a vastly military air, and more fashionable oaths to his vocabulary than all the other men put together could have produced.

"Now," he cried, "are you right, Miss Betty? Off we go, and the devil take the hindmost!" He gathered up the reins, touched the horses with the long whip, and, with a plunge and a jingle, they were away down the sloping road, calling laughing defiance to the rest to catch them if they could.

There was a general rush for the sleighs, one or two girls started their teams before their companions had jumped in, and the men had to run for it and scramble to their seats amidst good-natured laughter, to be recompensed with a bright glance, and perhaps a kiss or two when the night should have fallen. In the mirthful confusion nobody noticed that two of the party were missing. The horses in their sleigh—a couple of young foresters had assisted in hitching the vehicles to, and had now started on their own long walk to their hut—decided to do without them. One or two heads had turned back to see if the laggards were in sight; but, with a dozen or fifteen sleighs stringing out over the long road, it was impossible to say who was missing. The departure of all their stable companions made the abandoned horses unwilling to stay behind, so, after a slight pause, as if to give lawful authority a chance, they tossed up their heads and started gaily to follow the rest. Down the road they went, keeping intelligently to the tracks that tailed away like long ribbons cut in the snow, and jingling their bells with a delightful sense of unaccustomed freedom.

The winter dusk fell, cold and grey. It would be a little time yet ere the moon rose.

The delicate chill of the twilight was sharpening every sound among the young pine-trees. A big cone fell rustling through the branches to the dark ring of earth below, protected by them from the snow. A squirrel scurried away, just a streak of fur and two

bright eyes disappearing among the saplings which bordered the full-grown forest on the west. Even among the saplings the dusk had hung its veil already; to right and left the young pines spread on, those in the foreground discernible, like separate black lances pointing to the sky, the more remote merged in a shadowy mass, grey and cold, whispering sharply of the north, whence came the wind that was searching their buoyant branches with its keen breath.

Overhead the sky showed through in stretches of faint, unearthly green and rose, dying away to tender grey, like mother-of-pearl still wet with the sea. Far off, among the hills, a stream was murmuring icily to shivering grass and sedge. The long, dark nights had come, when winds would riot and great stars reign over the sleeping earth.

George was leaning against one of the trees in this nursery of half-grown pines. His dark riding-cloak was thrown back, showing the blue and silver of his coat, his great tie of costly lace was fluttered aside in the breeze. In his right hand was a switch, with which he was impatiently tapping his high boot. He had discarded the fringed shirt and leather gaiters of the mountains for the garments of civilization, and very well his tall, fine figure looked in them. As he stood bareheaded in the twilight, his face seemed a little pale, but had lost none of the firm strength it had taken on in the wilderness. Yet he was in some perplexity at this moment.

Before him stood a girl, whose tall shape was revealed in all its loveliness of curve and grace, for she had recklessly let her cloak fall around her feet, where its grey fur enveloped them like a cloud. Her close-fitting gown of grey flowered velvet fell away from throat and arms with touches of deep rose lining gleaming through the laces that hung in soft cascades, and were blown against the white flesh as the breeze played through them, powerless to chill the warmth of that peerless throat and bosom. The girl's eyes were of velvet darkness, her cheeks touched with the liquid crimson of a rose in June, and on her lips the summer seemed to have spilt its reddest wine. From the folds of a gauzy scarf, tied over her head and passed under her tilted chin, soft, dusky curls escaped, and blew in tangled sweetness across her neck. Reckless of night and cold, she stood, seeming to offer her glowing beauty to the wind's caresses, to the young man's eyes.

"George," she cried, and her voice had a strange, husky richness, "we must not go yet. We are so happy, and God knows when they will let us be that again."

George raised his eyes and smiled on her. It was good to be

with a beautiful girl once more, after his years of imposed asceticism beyond the Ridge and elsewhere.

"We have the ride home—together," he said, "and I think all the happiness in the world after that, Teresa. Why should any one grudge it to us?"

"They do," she cried, showing her little white teeth in sudden anger, "they will, always! Your mother thinks I'm the devil in petticoats—you know she does!"

"I'm not quite sure you're not!" retorted George, his eyes on her lips. "Anyway, he's found a consumedly becoming disguise, my dear!"

"Do you think so?" she replied, dropping her long lashes for a moment under his gaze. Then she raised them, and flashed a glance at him, a glance laughing with tricky mischief, but hot and dangerous with some inner fire. "My dear boy," she said, mockingly, "we are thirty miles from Pine Grove, or you would not dream of saying that! Mrs. Washington would not let you. You see, when she is not fully convinced that I am the devil, she is certain that I am the next thing to him, a naughty hawk at the very least, hovering over her plump chickens, and only hesitating as to which I will pounce upon! Do I look like a hawk, George?"

"No, you do not!" he said a little roughly, for her taunt had stung him, as she meant it to do, "you look like the most beautiful creature in the world, and you behave like the naughtiest one! As far as the hesitation goes, you are not at all unlike the hawk. I'll be hanged if either I or Sam have much in common with your plump chickens, but upon my word I don't believe you know which of us you mean to take, now!"

"George!" she cried, her lip trembling, and something like angry tears in her eyes, "how dare you say such a thing? After—after last night, too!"

"It was last night for me," retorted George, "and you kissed me, thank Heaven, and I mean you to do it again! But it had been poor Sam till then—as I very well know. Confusion, Teresa, I think you've made me steal my brother's sweetheart! I didn't know it till 'twas done, but that doth not make it any the prettier in his eyes or mine!"

"It's not my fault if Sam chose to be silly," she replied, pouting, "and besides, Mr. Brotherly Love, you did know! Betty wrote you all about it before ever I clapped eyes on you!"

"Betty did not write me that you had smiled on the poor lad and made him believe you cared for him," said George. "I

thought 'twas a fair field and no favour! I did not start to race with him neither; a dozen brothers may run after a lovely girl in all good faith, but 'tis her part to say which she'll have, not theirs to quarrel over the trying for her."

"Then what has made you enter the race?" inquired Teresa, indifferently, catching at her gauze scarf that had nearly flown away on the wind.

"I would rather not say," he answered, looking down. He could not tell her to her face what she knew as well as he, that during the last two or three days she had laid consistent siege to his heart, using every wile that reckless coquetry could bring to the service of her own dawning passion for the last man she had met.

But Teresa had too much self-confidence to be disturbed by any implied reproach.

"Shall I give you a bit of advice?" she said, her head on one side, and a very mocking smile on her red lips. "Retire, Mr. George! You find the prize not worth running for, I see. 'George Washington, the promising two-year-old, is scratched for this race;' there is something fine and definite about that! I don't care, you know!" And she kicked at the snow with a pointed, be-ribboned shoe as if she were disposing of an ungallant admirer.

This time he took no notice of her taunts.

"I'll not retire, thank you!" he said. "Where I am, I'll stay till I can get further."

"Then, in Heaven's name, what is all this pother about?" she cried. "'Tis you who know not your own mind, it seems! And here am I—poor, foolish, ill-favoured Teresa Carter—waiting humbly to see if my lord will deign to look my way! Demme, Mr. Washington, you are the strangest wooer I ever had!"

George suddenly took hold of both her wrists and looked down into her face, his blue eyes blazing with anger and jealousy.

"How many have you had?" he asked. "How many besides me that you kissed last night, and poor Sam that you've kissed a hundred times, as I learnt to-day? No, I'll not tell you who told me—one who saw—oh, girl, do you suppose I believe you *began* with Sam, or that you'll end with me?"

He spoke with terrible vehemence, and his strong hands were hurting her slight wrists quite unconsciously. But she loved the hurt, and all the instincts of her naughty being sang out with joy at having found a master. She leaned towards him with upturned, passionate face, eyes all on fire, and lips that cooed his name while asking for a kiss.

He was not quite eighteen. He caught her to him and kissed her again and again—on lips and cheeks and soft, downcast eyes. How she answered and nestled to him, shaking in the wild joy of his embrace! She drank kisses like desired wine. Then she threw back her head, laughing low and joyfully, leaning out against his enfolding arms. The upturned face, the white, throbbing throat and snowy neck were all he could see in the darkness, and they seemed passing fair.

"Now we must go back," said George at last, when Teresa had made him swear by all his gods that he would never quarrel with her again. In her melting mood it was easy enough to promise that. She had sprung into his vision as a dream of beauty on his return home from two years and more of almost complete separation from society—years in which he had hardly seen a white woman's face. What wonder that the reaction had carried him away—that senses forgotten during the ascetic life in the wilderness leapt up in delight at daily companionship with this wayward, enchanting creature, who gave—to take away—who gave back and claimed the value of her favours when she restored them after one of the innumerable quarrels with which she had already varied this two weeks' acquaintance. George, in the dangerous freshness of his vigorous young manhood, in the full, pure strength of his hardy, untainted life, was fated to succumb at once to the alert and lovely temptress now at his side.

At first Mary and the others had hailed his monopolizing of Miss Teresa as a strategical movement of self-sacrifice to set poor Samuel free from toils which at his age could lead to nothing but disaster. At sixteen—and Sam wanted a month or two yet of that respectable age—a boy's flirtation supplies his elders with amusement; but a real love-affair is a very different thing, and the lad's symptoms had been distressingly acute. George had been in love a dozen times before he went away to do his surveying for Lord Fairfax and the Government; but beyond a gentle melancholy when he could not find a rhyme for a sonnet, and an extreme attention to his clothes (whereby Billy Lee, and not the family suffered), there had been nothing to mark these initial flights as dangerous or disturbing. Betty, who had entreated him to come to Sam's rescue, noted, with increasing anxiety, the earnestness which he developed in carrying out the charitable task. Teresa as a friend, with numberless boxes full of the latest French fashions and no jealousy about making them common property, was distinctly an acquisition: Teresa as a sister-in-law might be regarded

in the light of a disaster. Betty, for all her apparent heedlessness, was too clear-sighted and well-trained not to take fright at her new friend's levity, at her want of dignity in her manner towards the other sex, at the cheerful irreverence with which Teresa affected to view the obligations of the married state.

"She means to flirt till she dies," said Betty to herself; "and she'll break George's heart if he marries her! Well, she shan't do that if I can help it!"

So Betty, thinking her remedy infallible, had remarked to George, while they were unpacking provisions for the lunch, that he was not making much progress in the promised rescue of Sam, "He and Teresa were sitting together for an hour in the hall the night before last, while you were going over papers with mamma," said Betty; "and—now don't break that plate, please,—he kissed her about twenty times, and she *let him*! If you are not careful, George, he'll be running away with her yet. Oh, you clumsy boy!"

The exclamation was elicited by a crash of crockery, and George, rather red in the face, was picking up the pieces with fingers that shook a little. His pride and sense rose up in arms together at Betty's revelation; and when Teresa had succeeded at last in detaching him from the rest of the party for a bit of undisturbed love-making, George had frightened her at first by his sternness and unresponsiveness to her wiles; then she had been sweet, enchanting, humble, apparently more in love with him than ever, and he had found her too lovely to quarrel with. What lover of eighteen has not his weak moments? As soon as he was subjugated she wanted to quarrel again, for the mere fun of making up; hence her remark about Mrs. Washington—a remark which had brought back all Teresa's sins to his mind. When he was out of sympathy with her they were readily remembered. Then came just what she wished—a scene of anger, and a reconciliation which welded his bonds more tightly. The ancient serpent would have been able to teach Teresa very little.

The night was dark around them, and behind the pines, up from the eastern ocean, the rising moon was throwing a fan of shadowy silver high against the sky. George turned suddenly and looked at it.

"My dear girl," he exclaimed, "we must indeed be going! We ought to be halfway home by now! I wonder why the others did not sound the signal? Are they *all* in love?" And he smiled down into her face, past resentments forgotten in the strange, new delights of proprietorship. Teresa had sworn, in

loving murmurs, that she would never, never look at any other man again.

But the teasing sprite laughed out gaily at his question. "In love?" she cried. "In love with supper, and home just now! I heard the signal long ago—two whistles—from ever so far away, just when you were being so cruelly unkind to your poor little friend!" And she stood on tiptoe, and made him kiss her again.

He gave the caress a little abstractedly, his eyes looking off into the forest over her head.

"You'll think me a terrible fool, child," he said, "but I had not comprehended what a distance we must have wandered from the rest. 'Twas you dazzled me, pretty one, and I came blind-fold, as love should."

"Vastly proper, sir," said the girl. "I'll not forget my triumph! Here is a learned surveyor of trackless wildernesses unbending so far as to get lost with a slip of a maid! Oh, but I'm monstrous proud of myself, Mr. Washington!"

"I am very much ashamed of myself," said he, uneasily. "I've not lost my way, so write that off your triumph, Teresa, but I've brought you further than I had any business to do; and here we are, far from the sleighs, and you walking in those foolish little shoes of yours—oh, you may take cold—I have been an idiot! Come, my dear, can you run a little? Take hold of my hand, and we'll make up for lost time!"

He held out his hand, and they began to run lightly over the snow. It marked a kind of path, leaving black ground, black trees, and whispering darkness on either side of them. George, holding Teresa's hand, trotted along with the easy, swinging step of the experienced woodsman, making no mistakes as to the direction to be followed, but wishing in his heart that his companion could go a little faster. He had to hold back in his stride to enable her to keep up with him. He knew that they must have over a mile to cover before reaching the camping place.

Teresa skimmed along lightly enough at first; then she stumbled once or twice, and George put his arm round her waist to prevent its happening again. But her breath was coming with difficulty, and when at last a small red shoe flew off, and George stopped to pick it up from the snow, she suddenly sank down on the root of a tree and declared she could go no further. The moon had risen now, and struck an oblique shaft on her where she sat, her head leaning back against a tree-trunk, her hand to her side, with all the appearance of complete exhaustion. The costume of the day was ill chosen for such exercises, with its heavy looped skirt and cruelly

tight bodice, so the poor girl had some show of excuse for her defection.

George was on his knees beside her in an instant. "My dear," he said, "are you ill? Oh, what have I done?" and his face wore a rueful expression of despair.

"I don't know," she faltered, her bosom heaving, and her face looking pale enough in the moonlight. "It's here," and she put her hand to her heart. "I think it's going to burst!"

George had heard that ladies fainted sometimes, and that the only way of bringing them round was to cut their laces. Where were those mysterious objects found on their tightly-encased little persons? Was Teresa going to faint? Should he have to slash at that marvellous long velvet bodice to save her life? He saw no halo of sentiment in the situation, and only longed for old Mammy or some other sensible woman to deal with the emergency.

Meanwhile Teresa, like a Dresden shepherdess in distress, leant back against the tree-trunk in an attitude of moribund grace, and George knelt despairingly beside her, feeling the wet snow soaking already through the knees of his best buckskin breeches. Not a sound came through the wood. They seemed cut off from the world, and time was passing.

"I'll have to carry you," he said, with very little enthusiasm. "Come, we must really be getting along!"

"You're a mighty cool-headed lover, sir!" Teresa found strength to say, somewhat viciously. "I don't believe you are in the least sorry for me!"

"Oh, there'll be time for that when I get you safe home," he replied. "Come, put your arms round my neck, and let me pick you up!"

"I won't!" said she, with a gleam of anger in her eyes. "You ought to think it an honour and a favour; and you speak as if I were a sack of corn!"

George groaned. "'Tis an honour I am quite unworthy of," said he; "I'll remember it to my dying day! I came out with fixed purpose to do it. There! Are you satisfied? Now, you must come, whether you will or no, for 'tis death for you to sit there any longer."

And resolutely he picked her up, as one picks up a child; and while she was still resisting and struggling he started to run on in the direction of the camp.

She ceased her struggles, and let him go a hundred yards or so. Then she gave a piercing scream, and tried to slip down from his arms.

"What has happened?" he asked, in sudden consternation as he set her on her feet before him.

She stuck out a small foot in an embroidered silk stocking. "My shoe!" she wailed, "they cost twenty crowns the pair!"

George had her on his shoulder again in an instant. "It's in my pocket, dear," he said. "I'd never let you lose the treasure! Now, do be reasonable, or we'll never get home at all!"

At last they came out into the open space at the eastern end of the dark pine wood. The moon in her wintry splendour dazzled them for a moment, so that George feared he must, after all, have lost his way. There was no one in sight. He gazed round in amazement; the cold, silver light showed him the place where the fires had been made, the ground at one side all stamped and hay bestrewn where the horses had been tethered, but that was all. Companions, sleighs, teams, all were gone. He and Teresa were alone, thirty miles from home, without any means of reaching that haven.

George rushed to the crest of the little plateau, and sent the woodman's long hallo far into the night again and again. It fell dead down the white slopes and empty road. There was no one within many miles to hear his cry.

Then he swore fiercely, but under his breath. The situation certainly justified some damnatory expletives. There appeared to be no other palliative for it of any sort. Alone, he would have laughed good-humouredly enough at the prospect of a tramp across country. Ten miles from here was a little posting-inn where he could have found a horse; but ten miles between Teresa and shelter was a very serious distance. He felt a hand on his arm and turned to find her standing beside him.

"My poor girl," he said, "will you ever forgive me for this?"

She seemed not to have taken in the more serious aspect of the case.

"Somebody is sure to come back for us," she said coolly. "I am not a bit frightened—are you?"

"I am horribly frightened," he returned, a frown on his brow. "You will be ill, and I don't know that even that is the worst of it. 'Twill be all over the country-side to-morrow. God only knows what the gossips will say. I wouldn't have brought this on you for the world, Teresa."

"Law!" she laughed, "my character won't die of it, I dare say! And what's more, I don't care if it does! Come, let us see if these deserters have left us a crust of bread. I am sure you are dying of hunger."

They found some remnants of the meal and a half-emptied bottle of wine. Teresa, perched on a tree-stump, like some bright-winged bird, all her animation revived with this thrilling piece of adventure, drank to the health of all forlorn lovers, and George swallowed his inward disquiet and fell into her mood. That was all very well for a little space. Then the cold and the loneliness sobered the girl. She slid down from her perch and crept into his arms, where he sat leaning against the stump.

"Give me of your warmth, love," she said, "for I am deadly cold."

And he took her on his knee, and wrapped his own cloak around them both, and whispered love-words in her ear; for he was young, and at the touch of her lips his blood threw off the chill of the night.

At last she fell asleep, her head on his shoulder, her heart against his. No thought of sleep came to the young man. Alone, on the edge of the whispering woods, with the moon showing him every line of her lovely face (where the colour had mounted again with warmth and food); with the witchery of her young body pressed against him in utter abandonment; with the barriers of restraint all fallen away from them both—what wonder that the heats of first passion danced and throbbed in his veins?—that the glimpses of that soft neck, touched white by the moonbeams where the fur cloak parted, set his heart beating wildly in his breast? The eternal war and reconciliation of the sexes were shaking the primal elements of his being. Conquering man held conquered woman to his heart, and it seemed as if the unseen forces of the night were calling them to bridal.

"My dear, my dear!" he murmured, bending down and kissing her brow.

She woke with a cry, staring up at him with despairing eyes. "Hold me, hold me—I am slipping down through the snow!"

"Was it snow you were dreaming of, love?" he said, kissing her again. "It should have been fire, Teresa—you were very close to it."

"Was I?" she said with, a slow smile. "I love the fire, you know."

"Do you know what you are saying?" he cried, his eyes shining dark above her.

She put up her hungry lips to be kissed, and was not refused.

"Again," she pleaded, "it is passing sweet!"

That kiss was the last. George shivered, but not from cold.

"Stay here, darling," he said gently, raising her from her nest and placing her with her back against the tree-stump. He drew her cloak close round her shoulders, and kneeling, wrapped her feet in his own. Then he rose and walked away to the edge of the plateau.

"Kind Heaven, send me aid!" he murmured. "I have been perilous near my fall."

Far, far away the ghost of a sound was travelling towards him through the night. He threw up his head and listened. The delicate music of distant sleigh bells was on the air, coming nearer and nearer. Now, far off, a mere speck on the winter road, a black object became visible, taking on tangible shape as it approached. With a joyous rebound to everyday sanity in every nerve, George put his hands to his mouth and sent his long, full cry to meet his helper. It was answered, and no love-word ever sounded so sweet in George's ears.

A moment more, and with wild jingle and glad calls of greeting the sleigh was dashing up the slope.

"George, old man! Where have you been hiding?" cried Sam, so glad to find his brother that he had forgotten his lady-love.

"Demme!" drawled Van Cortlandt, dropping from the sleigh. "You might have chosen a warmer night for an elopement, my friend. We never found out you'd given us the slip till we stopped for a glass at the halfway house, and your team came trotting up without you. You've cost me ten miles driving with Miss Betty! She was frantic till we started back to fetch you, you sad, wily dog! Where's Miss Carter?"

Miss Carter had shaken out her skirts and was hastily pulling on a little red slipper which she had fished out of George's cloak pocket. They had both forgotten all about it before.

"Come along," said Sam; "we must pack in somehow. Betty's making 'em all wait for us—says she wouldn't face mother with two lambs missing from the flock! Quite right, too, but we shan't be home till midnight. Now, Miss Carter—quick!"

"I wish it had been you instead, Sam," whispered the diabolical young coquette, as she took his hand to step into the sleigh.

But Sam did not even answer her. It seemed as if George had succeeded in his designs of rescue.

CHAPTER VI

MARY WASHINGTON had grown wise indeed with the passing years. Her few mistakes had been taken to heart as lessons. Speaking little, and never of herself, she had acquired a solid experience of human character which stood her in good stead. When George came to her the morning after his adventure with Teresa and told her that he intended to marry Miss Carter, and hoped he should have her approval in doing so, he was pleasantly surprised by all absence of remonstrance on his mother's part. He had been prepared for something of a conflict; he found apparent acquiescence.

"I take it, my son," said Mary, quietly, "that you have already disclosed your feelings to the young lady?"

"I have, madam," he replied, concealing his astonishment under a fine, grave demeanour.

"And she has not discouraged you?" pursued Mary, laying down her work in her lap, and looking up at him with a gleam of humour which he was too preoccupied to notice.

"Well, no, madam, not exactly," he said; and he was too young not to colour a little at certain remembrances.

"Would you object to telling me, my dear, whether you have yet mentioned marriage to Teresa?" asked Mary.

"I fear I do not understand you, madam," George answered, looking honestly puzzled. "Of course, it was in both our thoughts, but—there has scarcely been time to think of the future. Besides, I wished to speak with you as soon as possible."

"Yes, my son," said his mother, kindly. "That was what I should have expected. You have, of course, the greatest confidence in and respect for this young girl's character?"

"I love her with all my heart!" George exclaimed. "Surely that is enough! The rest is implied, madam. I assure you, you have been mistaken in your judgment of her."

This was not the moment in which to remember Teresa's

girlish shortcomings. He was convinced they would all turn to virtues in time.

"Very well," said his mother. "We will say that I have been mistaken. Now you had better go to her. Tell her that you are not yet eighteen, and that such property as is to come to you will not ensure decent living without many years of industry and economy."

"I do not see what that has to do with the question, madam!" was George's reply. "I have surely shown that I can exercise both."

"You have, very fully, my dear son. Nevertheless, please mention the fact I have stated when you formally ask for her hand. I shall wait with interest to hear Teresa's answer."

"I will bring it to you, madam," said George, joyfully. "Indeed, I thank you most sincerely for your consent to my desire."

And he left her to seek Teresa. Mary watched him go with some pain, but with no misgivings as to the result. It would prove a shock to him, but one she could not spare him. Nothing, she was convinced, could be further from Miss Carter's thoughts than to marry a comparatively poor man, a mere boy, with only an honourable name and a stainless character. But George would not have accepted the assertion from his mother. So he would have to take his little lesson first-hand, and the sooner it were over the better for all concerned.

George went to look for his divinity, and found that she had taken advantage of his absence to go out for a morning ride with Lieutenant Van Cortlandt, who had come over from Fredericksburg to inquire for the health of the ladies after the fatiguing expedition of the day before. It was Betty who gave him this information.

"Why did you not go with them, Betty?" he asked kindly, seeing that his sister looked ill-pleased at the arrangement.

"Because I was not wanted, brother," she replied, laughing a little sarcastically. "Two's company, you know."

"But," expostulated George, "I thought—we all thought, Betty dear, that Van Cortlandt had no eyes for any one but you!"

"For any one but himself, you mean," she replied. "He thinks he is the finest match that ever stepped, that his fortune—for, you know, he is very rich—makes every poor maid in Virginia crazy to marry him! Well, I've taught my gentleman that one of them isn't. I'm so glad."

"You have refused him?" exclaimed George. "Well, my

dear, I'm glad to hear it, for it saves me the trouble of doing so for you. He is not the husband to whom I would give you, little sister. But all this must be very recent, and why are you angry at his going out with Teresa? He is not going to marry *her*, at all events." And George laughed light-heartedly.

"No," said Betty, slowly, "but—she will marry him! She never knew about his fortune till I was fool enough to tell her this morning that I had refused it. It wasn't dishonourable—a girl must tell somebody when exciting things happen—and you should have seen her eyes blaze at the news! Then in he comes, and she runs to him and says, 'Do take me out for a ride, sir,' and off they went."

George suddenly turned and went out of the room, leaving Betty still smarting, not unnaturally, at the defection around her. Her brother, her girl-friend, and her late admirer, all appeared to have forgotten her existence.

Teresa came back, her eyes sparkling with assured triumph. When George, diffidently now, and with more restraint than ardour, gravely told her of his mother's consent, and asked leave to announce their engagement, Teresa burst into rippling laughter.

"Why, my dear," she cried, "you are only a boy, and we are both too ridiculously young to think of marrying at all! Come, we were a little sentimental yesterday, I admit—you are very handsome, and I like you monstrously—but 'tis a sister, not a sweetheart you're wanting, for some years to come."

Although the affair had flamed up only in the last two or three days, the shock of the disillusion was a very great one to the young man. The girls who had taken his budding fancy before had been well-bred, modest maidens, not averse to a guarded flirtation, perhaps, but quite incapable of going to the lengths which Teresa Carter had permitted herself and him. The revulsion was complete. George felt a sudden loathing for this beautiful creature, devoid of heart, devoid of all the virtues which, in his youthful chivalry, he imagined every woman must possess. He did not answer her for a moment, but stood gazing at her with an expression of incredulous horror. She tried to brave it out, and laughed again, hiding her face in her hands, as if in excessive amusement.

Then George stiffened, and saying coldly, "Heaven preserve me from sisters or sweethearts like you!" left the room.

An hour later he met his mother in the hall, and told her that, if convenient to her, he would ride over to Mount Vernon, and stay a day or two with Lawrence.

"Do, my dear," said Mary. "It gives him so much pleasure to have you."

She understood that that which she had foreseen had happened, and made no reference to their recent conversation. But she was very angry with the girl who had hurt her boy, and her heart was full of silent pain for him. It did not show itself in words, but she laid her hand on his arm for an instant, and the touch conveyed so much love and sympathy that George bent down and kissed the hand in quick gratitude.

"There is no one like you, dear mother," he said, and then he turned away quickly, unwilling that she should see the emotion in his face. She almost reproached herself for the happiness his words gave her. She knew that they had been spoken because of the pain another woman had inflicted on him.

Teresa was barely sixteen, yet so completely developed in every way for good and bad that she seemed in Mary's eyes older than Betty, far older than George, who had been doing a man's work for years past. It was difficult for George's mother to treat her with her accustomed gentleness after this distressing episode, and for the next few days she avoided finding herself alone with the girl. This was the less difficult, since Teresa was most of the time in the company of Lieutenant Van Cortlandt, who rode over, on one pretext or another, every day. Mary took fright, and expostulated gently with Teresa on the marked preference she showed for his society.

"I cannot permit you to go out alone with any young man, my dear," she said. "Such things are not seemly, and your grandfather would not approve. You see, I am placed in a position of great responsibility towards Mr. Carter in your regard, and you must, while you are here, observe the rules which I have laid down for Betty."

"I suppose you want young Van Cortlandt and his fortune for her, ma'am," said Teresa, pertly. "I am afraid you won't have them."

"Go to your room, Teresa," said Mary, sternly, and even the irrepressible Teresa quailed and obeyed. It was the first time that she had seen Mrs. Washington really angry, and that was an experience which none willingly repeated. She went to her room and sat down, with crimson cheeks and tearful eyes, to write a wild letter to her new admirer. She was insulted, treated like a child, imprisoned, she informed him, in order that she might not eclipse Betty in his affections. "Oh, for some one to deliver her from this bondage!"

The note was sealed and sent, for Mary exercised no irritating supervision over her young people. The honour and good feeling of her own children had made such things unnecessary, and she did not dream that Teresa would go so far as to write to Mr. Van Cortlandt at all. She herself wrote an urgent letter to Mr. Carter, of whose arrival in Fredericksburg she had been notified, begging him to come over at once. She would not now have felt justified in keeping Teresa any longer, and was thankful to think that her trial was so near its end.

Mr. Carter arrived the next day, and Mary laid her difficulties before him, without saying anything of Teresa's conduct to George. Mr. Carter was a charming, courteous old man, and was painfully surprised to find that any one, even his wayward granddaughter, should oppose Mrs. Washington's rulings. He had the most profound respect for Mary's character, and he knew that in others this generally amounted to awe. Teresa was sent for and lectured very severely. Mary refused to be present at the interview. When it was over, the girl came and sulkily asked pardon for her fault, a pardon which was at once granted. The reconciliation was effected late in the day, and Mr. Carter, who was somewhat infirm, accepted an invitation to stay the night, a circumstance for which Mary was afterwards almost unreasonably thankful. He had promised to take Teresa away in two days' time.

But a messenger rode up with a note for Teresa in the afternoon. He was not obliged to come further than the gate of the avenue, since she was waiting there for him. Merely telling him to say "yes" to the person who had sent him, she returned to the house, with heightened colour and a very joyous light in her eyes. Once in her room, she put a few valuables together, laid out her most becoming dress and cloak, and danced a triumphant little fandango; then she came downstairs, all sweetness and meekness, to hang round her grandfather, like a filial little angel, till bedtime. Before that hour struck, she had wheedled from him all the money he had in his pockets and a fine emerald ring which she had long coveted.

Towards midnight, when the household was asleep, she slipped noiselessly downstairs, out through the garden to the avenue. Beyond the gate, in the shade of a couple of the trees, some one was waiting with a couple of horses. Teresa sprang on the one with the side-saddle, and she and Lieutenant Van Cortlandt rode away together.

There was terrible trouble at Pine Grove when her flight was

discovered the next morning. Mr. Carter had a kind of fit, and Mary was so occupied in nursing him through it that she hardly realized what Betty meant, later in the day, by thrusting a note into her hand. When at last she could look at it, she found that it contained the polite announcement that Mr. Van Cortlandt and Teresa Carter had been married at eleven o'clock that morning, and the hope was expressed that no one would be displeased at the news.

"Better than it might have been," sighed poor Mary, "but I do thank God it happened at least while the old gentleman was here."

George, still ignorant of events, rode over from Mount Vernon to call on his old friend Major Satterthwaite the day after Teresa's flight with Mr. Van Cortlandt. They had met but once since George's return home. He found the major walking up and down his little sitting-room, speechless with vexation.

"What's wrong, major?" asked George, as the other came to a halt before him, his hands in his pockets, and his lips drawn in for a whistle of dismay.

"That which you have come to settle with me, I take it," replied Satterthwaite, still looking at him questioningly.

"I have no quarrel with you, sir," replied the young man, in amazement. "I have ridden over from Mount Vernon to have a chat with you, that is all."

"Oh, my dear lad," said the major, suddenly taking both his hands. "I thought you had come from Mrs. Washington to ask me to chastise that young scoundrel Van Cortlandt, and bring back the young lady. Of course, as his superior officer, I can't refuse all responsibility for him, but I can't bring back Miss Carter—married and all, yesterday—and it's my opinion you're all well quit of her!"

"Miss Carter—*married*?" gasped George, staring at the other in amazement. "What—what do you mean, major?"

"Good Lord!" cried the major, "didn't you know? Ran away in the dark—her grandfather in the house at the time—married yesterday morning—to the richest man and the most worthless young scamp in the regiment! I've got him packed off to Albany, though, girl and all—he was only here as a favour, and I asked it for him, the rogue! We'll see how Miss Teresa likes a Northern winter! I wasn't going to have that couple flaunting round Fredericksburg after such conduct. It's a disgrace, that's what it is, and I feel as if I didn't want to show my uniform in the streets."

Thus George learnt of Teresa's final choice of a husband. He took the news without much comment, but the major saw by the angry light in his blue eyes that the girl had managed to add him to the list of her victims. When he took his leave—the major, in spite of his own protestations as to showing the King's uniform in public, accompanied him to the end of the main street of the town. Then George turned his horse's head towards Pine Grove, and went to pay a visit to his mother. He was too concerned for the shock this event must have brought to her to feel any false shame about his own recent attitude towards the heroine of the adventure.

"Dearest madam," he said, as he sprang from his horse on meeting her, halfway down the avenue, "I have only just heard. I cannot tell you how greatly I regret this trouble for you!" And with an expansion very rare in his relations with her, he put his arm round her neck and bent and kissed her cheek.

There were tears in Mary's eyes. "I am indeed glad to see you, my dear," she said. "These things have shaken me, and poor Mr. Carter is still here and seems very ill. I cannot help fearing that I did not do enough to lead that unhappy child into better and wiser ways. What is Van Cortlandt's character, George? It is so hard for us poor women to judge. Will he make her a fair good husband, do you think?"

"As good as she deserves, I have no doubt," replied George. The whole subject was distasteful to him in the extreme; but he added more kindly, seeing his mother's look of distress, "Indeed, I have heard nothing bad of him before this, and seeing that he came not upon your invitation, but forced himself upon you somewhat against your will, I cannot feel that you have any responsibility in the matter. Pray put it out of your mind. No one can blame you for what has occurred."

"That would matter little if I were sure I ought not to blame myself," said Mary. "Betty tells me that he proposed to her on the return from your sleighing expedition. Of course my dear girl refused him. He is not the man to attract your sister. But it argues ill for his constancy to a sacred engagement taken on with such precipitation. I fear he must be very flighty and unstable."

"Half the world is that, mother," said George, "and, God knows, they are well matched!"

That was his last comment on the matter, but Mary knew that it had made a deep impression on him. After years she thought it must have done much to decide his usual impersonal

attitude towards women in general. After this disillusionment he maintained, through most of his subsequent affairs of the heart, a curiously complete self-control. He did not lose faith in the sex by any means, but his opinion of its importance was diminished. He seemed to generally regard women as charming, delightful, more or less necessary creatures, always to be treated with the delicate chivalry which was a part of his nature ; but indispensable they were not, and it was doubtful whether they could ever take rank in serious importance with the many absorbing objects claiming his attention. His warm heart and healthy, natural tastes made him reach out for the sweet, normal consolations of faithful companionship with a good and pretty wife, but Mary, watching her son pass through the marvellous developments of his early career, believed that the honour granted her, of being a prime factor in her son's life, would never be shared with any other member of her sex.

George spent some little time at Mount Vernon with Lawrence, where affairs of the first magnitude to him were now under discussion. But he did not allow them to keep him from his work, and was soon away again on his Government surveys, willing to wait until the time should be ripe for his elder brother's plans for him to take shape. Mary's son had inherited her strong patience, a rare quality, which in the end wrings every ounce of value from the changes and chances of life. He was recalled to Pine Grove by an event of stirring import to his family—Betty's marriage to Colonel Fielding Lewis in March, 1750. The bridegroom was a recent widower, his first wife having been a close relation of Augustine Washington. But life was short in Virginia then, and no one was shocked when the departed having been duly and lovingly mourned for a short space, their places were filled by the living and their tasks taken up by other hands. To Mary, the woman of the constant heart, these quick second marriages were incomprehensible ; but she wisely realized that her own case was the exception, and that the rule was a healthy and natural one. She gave her one dear daughter to Colonel Lewis with no tremors for the cherished girl's future, and although the separation would deprive her of the companion whose presence had been a source of unspeakable comfort and brightness, she was thankful that Betty's choice had fallen on a man of high character, kindly disposition, and competent fortune. The fact that the young girl would have to be mother to his children at this, her own early start in life, presented no drawback to Mary's mind ; the same thing had happened to herself, and she had found in her eldest

stepson a devoted adherent and counsellor, whose assistance and influence with her own children, after their father's death, had been invaluable and unflinching. Also she took great comfort from the fact that Kenmore, Colonel Lewis's house, was in Fredericksburg, and that there would never be more than the width of the Rappahannock between Betty's new home and her old one.

A bride's plenishings, in those leisurely days, were all prepared and stored away for her while she was growing up. Fine linen and silver, rolls of silken and woollen stuffs, bedding, and even furniture were mostly ready when she tripped in her sweet freshness from nursery and schoolroom into the social life of her class. Consequently, when the bridegroom appeared, there was little save the wedding-dress and wedding-cake left to prepare, and the bride and her family were not worn out by weeks of hurry and disquiet.

Mary's hands trembled a little as she dressed her darling for the great ceremony on that bright March morning. The girl was in a dream of happiness, and looked like a new-blown rose. As she turned to her mother for a last kiss before leaving the room where they had held such loving companionship these long years past, her eyes were dewy with tender yet happy regret. Mary folded her in her arms, and kissed her once and then again, thinking of the father who would have rejoiced in his little girl's beauty and happiness. Then they came out, hand in hand, and George stepped forward, brave in blue and silver coat, gilt sword, and lace ruffles, to take that father's place, and give his sister away to the man of her choice.

When it was all done, and Betty's mother was alone the next evening, putting away the little possessions that the bride had used and cherished till now, she came across a small pink bow, faded and crumpled, in the corner of a drawer. It was a very old one which Betty, with one of those whims that happy girls have, had always chosen to keep as a memento of the first time she had worn such an ornament. As Mary drew it out and looked at it, a scene came back to her out of the vanished past, a memory of the day when Betty had burst in on her father and mother, and had finally consented to make her state curtsy to them. The picture of the child, in her blue silk frock, with this very bit of pink ribbon in her flying curls, was so vivid that Mary realized, for the thousandth time, all that she had lost.

"Oh, my dear, my dear," she cried, in the loneliness and silence, not to the sweet daughter, but to the dead husband, "why could you not stay with us, why did you leave us so soon?"

It was long since she had wept, but a few scalding tears fell on the faded ribbon, and then she put it reverently away.

After the first painful impression of solitude caused by Betty's departure had passed off, Mary found in her daughter's home across the river a constant source of interest and novelty, and was more drawn out of herself than she had been at any time since Augustine's death. Betty was continually calling on her mother for help and advice, and the yellow coach with the four greys (these last grown over-fat in idleness) was brought out oftener in a month than it had been in years previous to the great event. Mrs. Washington, her still beautiful face looking out from her black capuchon, went backwards and forwards, sometimes alone, sometimes with the blooming young wife of Fielding Lewis at her side. The change gave her back some of her lost elasticity, and she felt a distinct pleasure in meeting her old friends again, either at Kenmore, or in the streets of Fredericksburg. Also she found that another interest was growing into her life, round the boy who had come to her from the other side of the water. Young Robin was the age of her own youngest son, and, though brought up in far different surroundings and inclined at first to overrate his own importance, proved to be a warm-hearted, gentle boy, quickly grateful for kindness shown him, and so glad to be at Pine Grove that Mary would let him stay with her for days at a time. She grew really fond of the motherless lad, who brought her a hundred little confidences and clung to her as her own sons, lapped in love and forethought all their lives, and taking these as their right, had never needed to do. He would dash in, with a freedom which surprised the others, his blue eyes dancing with some school triumph or home pleasure, to tell Mrs. Washington all about it. She had advised Hector to let him study with the master who was still supervising her Charles's education, and had in many motherly ways helped Hector to arrange for the boy's comfort and happiness. She had her reward in seeing his increasing loveliness, his regard for the things which she knew would make for his good; and, remembering certain disadvantages of his parentage, she took especial trouble to arm him against what would probably be his most besetting temptations, by showing him the need in life for principle and self-control.

Taken all in all, the year which succeeded Betty's marriage was a happy one for Mary. It is true that she saw little of her George, who enjoyed, by some divine right, her first thought and dearest affection. When he visited her the sun shone, the air was balm, the world a place of peace and sweetness, whether he

came in winter or summer, whether the little affairs of daily life were going smoothly or captiously; when he departed, he took much of the brightness with him, but not the happy satisfaction which his strong, joyous character and well-earned position gave her. Of obscure work he had made an honourable career, and was rewarded with universal respect. Mary had known that her boy was good, intelligent, industrious, as well as high principled and thoughtful in a degree astonishing at his age; but when she realized that he was fast becoming a man of certified importance, whose opinions already weighed in any society where they were pronounced, Mary felt a secret glow of pride, such as she had never experienced before.

It seemed as if life for her, after enclosing her in a somewhat narrow round for years past, were opening out and taking on some small portion of colour and radiance again, and she was too honest not to accept the alleviations humbly and thankfully. When she and George stood sponsors for Betty's first boy in the next spring, she knew that she still had love to give, love for this first dear grandchild, and all who should follow, love for friends and neighbours and love perennial, inexhaustible, for the children who had come to her in her splendid youth, and now stood round her like a guard of honour in her noble middle age.

BOOK V

THE PASSING OF THE SHADOW

CHAPTER I

FOUR men were sitting round the table in the dining-room at Mount Vernon on a warm spring afternoon. The three-o'clock dinner was over, and they were smoking their long pipes and sipping their wine in the leisurely fashion of men whose day's work is practically done. But their countenances were grave, and it seemed as if the subject last under discussion must have been one of importance.

Lawrence Washington was sitting at the head of the table. His fine face showed the ravages of disease, and the hand that toyed with the wine-glass was painfully white and thin. The sunken temples, the waxen colouring, proclaimed all too plainly the approaching end of the fight; but Lawrence thought little of himself in the last years of his life. Next to his care for his wife and child, his most earnest preoccupation concerned the future of his young brother George, and it was George who was the subject of this friendly council, convened to take measures for his advancement.

On the right of the big, square table sat an old officer of Militia, Adjutant Muse, a typical Virginian soldier, who had fought with Lawrence under Admiral Vernon. He was a silent man, spare, grey-eyed, grey-haired, with a marvellous knowledge of the science of war. The seat on the left was occupied by a burly Dutchman, Van Braam, the best fencer between the ocean and the Ohio, who had taught half the gentlemen in America the fine art of sword-play. He was younger than Muse, had blue eyes like a child's, with a certain humorous twinkle in their glance, and even now was balancing a fruit-knife as if it were a rapier, and

making passes at a big, belated winter apple that rolled like a flustered enemy round his plate. Opposite Lawrence sat Major Satterthwaite, leaning back in his chair and staring at the smoke-rings that he was blowing up towards the ceiling across a broad shaft of sunshine which struck full on his big, dark face and brought out the somewhat ignoble features of George the Second in the Dettingen medal on his breast.

The Major had been tipping back his chair in the effort to get room for his long legs to extend themselves under the table. He suddenly righted himself with a thump on the polished floor which made Lawrence start.

"Yes," said the Major, setting down his glass with extreme care as if to atone for the first disturbance, "the time has certainly come to act, and I, who have been waiting for it these eight years past, am consumedly thankful to hear it!"

"Eight years?" exclaimed Lawrence, while the other two men glanced at Satterthwaite in surprise. "How is that, major? My brother was a child then."

"I could hardly call him that, Mr. Washington," the major replied, in his strangely gentle voice. "He had just been presented with his first sword, and a finer, more soldierly little lad I never saw. Your respected father did me the honour to ask my opinion as to whether he should put him into the Service, and we sent for the youngster to have a look at him. 'Twas late, but Master George was out of bed and with us in a twinkling, dressed in a nightshirt and a sword! Wasn't going to forget that, not he! Mr. Washington agreed with me that 'twas right stuff for a soldier, but Heaven did not give him time to carry out his views."

"And my dear stepmother abhorred them!" said Lawrence. "Nevertheless, I believe we shall meet with no opposition from her now. The state of the country in the west is such that I consider every gentleman's son in Virginia should be trained to assist in its protection!"

"Is not that a bit of special pleading for your Ohio company, Mr. Manager?" interposed Van Braam, with a laugh.

"Yes," said old Muse, turning to Lawrence, "you love that company as if it were your own child, but your little one is a girl, you rogue, so you can talk at your ease about other people's sons!"

"I wish I could hope to have a dozen to throw into that service," said Lawrence, good humouredly, but with decision. "The Ohio is America, at this moment, and 'tis a burning shame to leave the defence of our whole western frontier in the hands of

two or three score of untrained, undisciplined volunteers, without even an experienced officer to command them!"

"You think the French are taking advantage of our carelessness to extend their borders?" inquired Muse, impressed by Lawrence's earnestness.

"Think? I know!" replied Lawrence; "why, man, the few dribblets of news I can get from my own outposts show me how our people are letting themselves be pushed back towards the mountains. Tribe after tribe of Indians, who were friendly to us a year or two ago, have been drawn into alliance to the French, into their pay, I do believe, and will neither trade with us nor let others do so. And 'tis but a few nights since my stepmother received a letter from some relative of the Chevalier de St. Pierre, —'twas a half-crazy old Frenchman and his niece to whom she gave hospitality some two or three years ago—boasting of the extension of power and territory which their people were acquiring in those districts day by day!"

"What confounded impudence!" roared Adjutant Muse, bringing down his hand with a thump on the table.

"Ah, they're d——d clever, the Frenchies!" remarked Van Braam, the soldier of fortune who could not refrain from admiring the winning side.

"It should not take much cleverness to do what they are doing now," said Major Satterthwaite, with some asperity. "They know the value of the frontier, they have men, money, arms—and from Lake Erie down to St. Louis their own people behind them, while we——"

"Have parsimonious, fat burgesses who'll not spend a shilling for the country, deserting militia, and officers who won't join their companies at all! Oh, 'tis sickening!" This outburst came from Lawrence, and showed how deeply he took the condition of affairs to heart.

"What details did Madam Washington's correspondent give?" inquired the major. "I should be interested to learn, I confess."

"I have the letter here," said Lawrence, "I thought of laying it before Governor Dinwiddie to convince him of our danger." He drew a letter from his pocket, and passed it to Muse. "Will you read it aloud, adjutant, for the company's benefit?" he continued. "I fear my voice might not hold out."

The adjutant spread the thin sheet on the table before him, pinched a pair of horn-rimmed glasses on his nose, and began to read, Satterthwaite and Van Braam leaning forward eagerly to listen.

"I say, my friend," said the adjutant, suddenly peering at Lawrence over his spectacles, "have you made no mistake? This opens for all the world like a love-letter!"

"Oh, set your mind at rest!" laughed Lawrence, "'tis the only fashion of politeness possible to a Frenchman's mind when writing to a lady—though he never beheld her but once, and she be as unapproachable as my dear stepmother!"

"Oh, very well," said the adjutant, raising his eyebrows, "gentlemen, this is how a Frenchman writes to Mrs. Washington!"

"Most fair, heroic, and adorable lady, my Poor old Bones are indeed Prisoners of a Fort in the Wilderness, but my Heart, touched to youth during some Elysian Days passed under your hospitable Roof, has flown back thither with grateful constancy, and I can no longer refrain from recalling myself to your most gracious memory. How kindly you Pressed us to Remain, with what Imagery of Truth and Terror did your Lovely Lips describe the Hardships and Difficulties which then Lay before us in our irrevocable Design to attempt to reach our poor Cousin and cheer his Solitude although we might perish in the effort! Am I right in Thinking that your Charitable wishes, the preoccupations of your Gentle Heart, have followed us in This Terrific Enterprise? Ah, I am sure of it, for not otherwise should I have been able to defend my poor niece against Wild Beasts and Savages and bring Her in Safety to this Place! It will be the greater Satisfaction to you to know that after many Miraculous escapes we did at last reach Fort Lebœuf, to be Received by our poor outcast Countryman, the Chevalier de St. Pierre, as if we were Angels from Heaven! The Solitude is overpowering to the human mind, and the Food—ah, my dear Lady, that was so Bad that I verily believe the good Saint Antoine in the Deserts of Europe had not worse! But my dear Elizabeth was borne here on the Wings of a Benignant Destiny to save our poor Countrymen's martyred Digestions! She had not been here a Day before the Chevalier and his aide-de-camp came out into the court before the Kitchen, their noses in the air, a Radiant smile on their Lips, Seeking for the Cause of a delicious Odour which hung in the Atmosphere like Incense of Lucullus! '*Ciel*,' cried the Chevalier, 'Do I smell a veritable *Pot-au-Feu*? What Magic is in the air to-day?' The Younger Officer bursts into tears of Sensibility exclaiming, 'Oh, *ma Mère*, have you returned from Paradise to make Soup for your Unfortunate exile of a Son?' Then my Elizabeth emerges from the Kitchen, bearing the Tureen in her fair hands, and these

poor Martyrs of Duty fly to her to embrace those Hands and call down blessings on her Head! I stood by, the tears rolling down my Cheeks at sight of their Joy! I must tell you, Madame, that when we arrived, my good Cousin was not very Polite. He appeared amazed at the Lengths to which Family Affection had carried me, and permitted himself to ask me what the very many Devils I expected him to do, with a Superannuated Mariner and a Delicate Woman in Fort Leboeuf? I replied that on my side I could at any Rate give him the Benefit of much experience and advice, and begged him to remember how much my poor niece, his cousin, had suffered, and how earnestly I hoped that all this novelty and Change might distract her Mind from her bereavement. Instantly he was all Devotion and Chivalry—none ever calls upon the Heart of a gallant Frenchman in Vain—and after that Affair of the Soup, asked my permission to pay Her his Addresses. I Bade him wait and hope. The Surroundings being Grand and inspiring, and Monsieur de St. Pierre a man of Fine Figure and great Elegance, I Trust that, although two or three years have passed, a charming Romance will still in Time be acted Before my Eyes. Let us not Hurry to Have it over too soon! Cupid is a young gentleman who will dance prettily to the Cornemuse, but has never yet learnt to march to the drum!"

The adjutant was out of breath and stopped to rest. His reading had been interrupted by various outbursts of laughter from the other men. "No wonder you would not read aloud this d——d nonsense, Lawrence," he growled. "Here's nice stuff to take to a State Council! Is there much more of it?"

"You've reached the boundary now," said Lawrence. "'Tis written with as beautiful silliness as what we have just heard, but the facts are serious enough."

Then Muse went on—

"Although my poor Countrymen swear that they are Forlorn exiles, they have made a little Transatlantic France of this Wild Country. Trust the Gallic Spirit to Impress itself on the most Savage surroundings! Its Courage and quickness can never Fail! Here I see a hundred New Forts built along the Banks of the River, the Dominion of my great Sovereign extending itself in every direction. This very morning I accompanied my Cousin on a March of Conquest towards the east, taking possession of twenty miles of New Land, the most Fertile and beautiful Imaginable, between the Ohio and the Monongahela Rivers. Calling up the Indian feudatories of our Rule, magnificent Savages whom we

Pay with inexpensive Spirits, we did in their Presence, bury many plates of lead bearing our King's name, along our New Boundary Line, this Being the usual manner of marking Property in These Parts. Oh, Madame, every Beautiful Woman is French at Heart! Surely you would have rejoiced to See our Brave Commander, followed by a Force of at least Two Hundred Men, planting the Banner of my Noble Country on hill after hill of these Wilds! Ever will the Heart and Arm of a Frenchman be Found in the Van of Civilization!"

"There," said Lawrence. "You need go no further, adjutant! Our friend found it impossible to surpass that flight of impertinence, and the rest would not interest the company. Well, gentlemen," he cried, turning first to one and then to another, "what do you think of it? Is there not matter here to move Virginian minds? Are we to wait to stop these marauders till they bury leaden plates along the Potamac and plant the Banner of their confounded country on the Court House in Williamsburg?"

"Oh, my God," said old Muse, biting his fingers in suppressed fury, "is it not possible to get together a few battalions of honest fighting-men to chastise these upstarts? Where are your soldiers, major?" he asked, turning fiercely to Satterthwaite. "With all we pay the mother-country, of taxes and imposts, can't she give us even enough men to keep thieves from our doors? Are the nation's frontiers to be left for ever to private persons, to guard or desert as the burgesses bid them? We shall be swept into the sea if this goes on much longer!"

Satterthwaite rose slowly from his place, his enormous height towering above the table, and his face looking very sad and stern in the light of the setting sun.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you forget that this is not the only frontier England holds and cannot see. My own regiment at least is engaged in keeping the French from marching down to New York from Canada, a little expedition they would dearly enjoy. Meanwhile, take my advice, and don't wait for ready-made troops from Britain. You'll do little with your older men here. I'm no scholar of divinity, but I think I remember a good soldier in Holy Writ who in much affliction described his adversaries as having grown too fat to fight. That is the case with your burgesses and governors and recruits, all so over-fed in idleness that the mere mention of a bullet sets them shaking in their shoes. But your young stuff is fine! Let Mr. Washington make a leader of his brother George, and soldiers will spring up in his steps.

The lad hath fire and sense enough to re-christen the nation ! When will we begin, sir ? ” He looked towards Lawrence.

“ Now,” said Lawrence. “ I’ll call him up from Williamsburg at once. Will you teach him all you know, Muse ? Van Braam, he was an apt pupil of yours once ; will you make him a credit to his master and his country ? ”

Lawrence reached out a hand to each of his old fighting friends, and the men returned his grasp with a warmth that meant more than words.

“ Thank God that’s settled,” said Satterthwaite, with a great sigh of relief ; then, raising his glass, he cried, “ Here’s to General George Washington, gentlemen ! ”

“ Make him commander-in-chief while you’re about it, major,” said Lawrence, with a smile. And then George’s four friends drank to his success.

It was with an unexpected sense of being let out of bondage that George heard the result of this council of war. That which had called to him all his life as the most alluring and interesting of occupations, was suddenly presented to him as a duty, endorsed by all that his elders’ opinions and his country’s need could give it of force and reason. Almost alone, as a growing youth, he had explored the frontier, and had, while learning all the hard conditions of its life, learnt a hundred facts about it which were unknown to others. These would be of the greatest value to him now. With but small apprehension of the result, he went to tell his mother of the decision.

“ So the sword will have you, after all, my son ! ” she said sadly. “ Well, Heaven’s will be done. I had hoped this need not be.”

“ Madam,” replied George, “ your kind sympathy with my ambitions has permitted me for nearly four years past to lead the very life which has prepared me for this one, in which all dangers will be so sensibly minimized that I trust you will feel not one new pang of anxiety for my safety. Was that safety greater when I wandered, poorly armed, with one or two servants for my companions, young in body and in experience, over the wild country which I now know so well ? As an officer in the Virginian service I shall at least have arms and soldiers to my following, and am less likely to be attacked than I was in my former private and undefended capacity. Your surveyor, dear madam, was encountering all the dangers that can beset a soldier—your soldier is but the surveyor protected by his uniform and his comrades. Believe me, mother, you have made of me a man who must be nothing but a failure if he be kept from the finest work a man can do ! ”

"I do believe it, my son," she said, looking up into the face that made her pride. "God be with you now and always. You will, with His blessing, render good service to our country, and I would not hinder you."

"'Tis you who have given me the will and the power to serve it," he said earnestly. "Whatever the future may hold for me, I shall owe all the good in it to my mother."

Then, his heart at rest about her, he threw himself with his whole strength into learning all that Muse and Van Braam could teach him; the rooms at Mount Vernon rang to the music of the foils day after day, while in quieter hours George and the adjutant worked out all the intricacies of tactics, strategy, and fortifications. These were happy days for George, only clouded by Lawrence's gradual loss of strength, of which, however, he, the younger brother, in his redundant youth and health, was less vividly conscious than the other members of his family. When he received his commission of Adjutant-General of a body of the Virginia Militia, which gave him the rank of major, he put on his grand new uniform, buff with blue facings, military cloak and gold sword-knot, and rode over to Pine Grove on his finest charger to visit his mother; and Mary was woman enough to rejoice greatly over the splendid appearance he made.

There was no opportunity for private talk this time, as Mrs. Washington had visitors. Hector and Robin McClean had ridden over from Cray that afternoon, and Hector nearly wrung George's hand off in the warmth of his congratulations. Robin, shooting up into a fine, tall youth, was speechless with admiration, and walked round and round George to view every aspect of his grandeur and learn it by heart.

"Well, Robin," said George, with a smile, when he became aware of what was in the youngster's mind, "does my appearance meet with your approval?"

"Eh, sir," said the boy, "but you must be the happy man this day! Might I see the sword bare of its case?"

George, remembering his own boyish longings, humoured him, and Robin touched the bright blade with wondering reverence.

"Is it not beautiful, ma'am!" cried Robin, looking up from it to find Mary's eyes fixed upon him rather sadly. "I'm to be a soldier, too; Hector says my father wishes it. May I come with you, then, Major Washington?" he asked, glancing eagerly back to George's face.

It was Mary who answered with sudden seriousness, "You have much to learn before you can do that, Robin. Follow George's

example in some other things first, or you will not be fit to follow it in this. There are harder things in a soldier's life than the wearing of a grand uniform."

George could not remain long, as it was already late in the day. After his departure Robin became moody, and listened silently to Hector's talk with Mrs. Washington. Mary, seeing that the conversation did not interest him, sent him out to wander through the garden and pay a visit to the stables. When Hector, on rising to take his leave, called him to come and do the same, Robin was found to have been sitting near by on the old garden bench.

"You are very quiet to-day, child," said Mary, laying her hand on his shoulder. "I am sorry neither John nor Charles were here to entertain you."

"I was not looking for them, ma'am," the boy replied, with a slight frown, and some thought that dimmed the brightness of his blue eyes. "Is—is Miss Carter never coming back, ma'am?" he asked, as if the question were forced upon him.

"No," said Mary, starting a little at the name. "Ah, there are your horses. Good-bye, Hector; good-bye, Robin. You'll be going back to school to-morrow? That is a good thing. You always seem happier when you have your tasks to think about."

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"Robin," said Hector, suddenly, after riding two or three miles in silence, "What made ye ask after Miss Carter? She'll no be coming back to Pine Grove. She's married now—don't you mind?"

"I had forgotten," said the boy, passing his hand over his eyes as if to sweep some veil away. "I dreamed of her last night. I sometimes do."

CHAPTER II

THE next chapter in George's life was a very sad one. Lawrence, to whom he owed so much, grew rapidly worse during the summer of 1751, and George spent much of his time with him at Mount Vernon. As the summer drew to a close, it was decided that Lawrence should winter in Barbadoes, where it was hoped the soft climate might do something to restore his strength. George put aside his military work, which consisted in attempting to organize and discipline a body of raw and unwilling militiamen, and accompanied Lawrence to Barbadoes. The two chief results of the expedition to George were the first of that series of careful, incisively written journals with which he so greatly enriched the history of his time, and a violent attack of small-pox, which he contracted from being too fastidiously polite to refuse an invitation to Governor Clarke's house, where it was known to have broken out. Fortunately he recovered quickly, and returned home in February of the following year, a young man of twenty, with a good deal of varied experience behind him.

Lawrence had not benefited by the tropical winter, and failed visibly during the months after his return. His death, in July, was a bitter grief to the younger brother, who had become accustomed to look to him for the most unfailing sympathy and wise counsel. Instead of having now a warmly revered friend, to whom he could turn in difficulty, George found himself left the guardian of Lawrence's widow and child, with a large property to be seen to; it was a heavy charge for a very young man, whose tastes and official obligations made his presence imperative far from Mount Vernon. It would have been a great added grief had he been shown then that a short year later, sweet Anne and her little girl would follow Lawrence to the land of shadows, leaving George sole heir to the great, empty house and the broad acres which had been theirs. But no such sad enrichment was in the young man's thoughts, and he did all he could to comfort his sister-in-law and

keep the property in good order for her, while he had already begun to experience the frightful difficulties of his military duties. The Burgesses would not offer sufficient pay to tempt the better class of men to leave comfortable homes to enter on purely voluntary service; the men who did join were for the most part rascallions, who had nothing to lose, and of whom nothing could be made; officers were named who laughed openly at the idea of undertaking the discomforts of any daily drill at home or active service in the field; and George, too confident of final success to be really disheartened, yet felt puzzled and foiled on finding himself in the position of an officer without men to command. It was a situation which was to repeat itself with distressing emphasis many times in his future career. Sometimes he was discouraged, sometimes moved to mirth, by the supine attitude of the Burgesses, in whose hands the matter really lay. Men of peace, and of easy social standing, it was impossible to make them realize that a subtle and aggressive foe was creeping up to their very doors. The subordinate position which all Colonial officers held as compared to the Regulars, in the Royal service, seemed to have tinged even the American public mind with some unconscious contempt for the former; their warnings, founded on the most potent facts, were received with something like scorn. Did not the British officers who came in the Governor's train, or who were scattered here and there in the towns, scoff at any danger which might be supposed to be looming up beyond the Alleghanies? "What are you all afraid of?" they would say again and again. "Why, everybody, except that old cynic, Satterthwaite, knows that a few battalions of British infantry can clear the country of the French the moment they show themselves. Bah! you Americans are too easily scared—you have lost the old British spirit."

These opinions were quoted pompously to Major Washington when he respectfully asked for money to raise troops. And when, unconvinced, he insisted upon repeating his demands, he was told to find the recruits himself since he considered them so necessary, and the Burgesses would see what could be done about paying them afterwards. Altogether there were times when, but for the encouragement of Satterthwaite, and his two instructors, Muse and Van Braam, George would have felt that his commission was the authorization of a sinecure, that military life for a Colonial officer was a farce deprived of all serious meaning.

At last, however, early in 1753, the Governor was awakened to a sense of the extreme peril of allowing the French to continue their aggressions unchecked. Fearful tales were brought over the

mountains, of slaughter by Indians, of the building of forts on the East bank of the Ohio, of dislodging of British outposts to take possession of their settlements, of all the movements which announced that the enemy had gathered strength and confidence during the last few years, and was now preparing to strike some decisive blow for all the Ohio territory still called Virginia, and left to Virginia's sole care. In haste and perturbation a commissioner was sent to inquire into the truth of these things, and remonstrate against them; but the ambassador had no stomach to get to the French firing line. He had seen and heard enough to satisfy him over a hundred miles from that uncomfortable boundary, and he came home as fast as he could to excuse his pusillanimity by graphically told stories of the acts of violence he had beheld. Whether the Governor entirely believed his account or no, it pointed to a state of things which demanded both investigation and remonstrance.

Before Lawrence's death George had added to the other difficulties of life by falling in love with Miss Cary; he was still much cast down at having been repulsed by her father, somewhat curtly, on account of his only moderate fortune. When he learned that Governor Dinwiddie was trying to find an experienced and resolute man for this unpopular quest, he sprang up in joy that his hour had come at last, and that the country was finally awakened to its danger. Who so fit as he to carry out the Governor's commands? Inured to hardship, familiar with the vast districts to be traversed, as well as with their wandering inhabitants, a keen and methodical observer, he knew that this task was intended for him, and he believed that it would not be entirely fruitless. He at once presented himself, and was received with joy. Here was an envoy who would not turn back before his work was done, at any rate!

That George himself hoped to effect little by the remonstrance with which he was charged is evident both from the nature of the case and from the succinct account of his experiences, which made such a stir in America and England when it was made public after his return. The true object of the embassy was investigation, and most thoroughly did George carry it out. He was one to whom Fortune held out her best favours with a mailed hand.

The conditions of this expedition made it appear a journey of pleasure compared with those which he had undertaken in the lonely hardships of his survey work. When George set forth this time, armed with proper credentials, accompanied by the faithful fencing-master Van Braam, and by Christopher Gist, the king of

living pioneers, with servants and arms and provisions, he looked back with something like respect to his own boyish self, travelling on foot, knapsack on back, through this very country, merely intent on learning his trade and making an honourable living. On his way to Willie's Creek, where Van Braams was to join him, he halted at the spot at the head of the Shenandoah Valley, where, three years before, he had sat in the moonlight, reading a packet of letters from home. His little hut was still standing on the grassy eminence above the stream. The woods where he had blazed paths and marked trees still kept the traces of his passage. They were once more in all their autumn glory, for it was October, and again the hunter's moon hung huge and golden in the sky, again the maples sent their flaming fleets circling down on the crystal eddies of the Shenandoah.

"Only three years," thought George, "and so much gone, so much that I never hoped for come! Then, I scarce dared think of what seemed forbidden ambitions, now the doors have opened of themselves. 'Twill be my own fault if they ever close again."

In spite of the comparative triumph of the start, this journey was destined to prove beset by terrible difficulties and constant dangers. It took him some six weeks to penetrate to the stronghold of Fort Lebœuf, far in the north-west near the shores of Lake Erie, weeks during which there had been risky parleys with disaffected chiefs, whose reconciliation had cost George many days of delay, and more talking than he had ever done in his life; the French tried to stop him from going further; each station of theirs was an obstacle, whether he met with open opposition, treachery, or gay, careless hospitality—hospitality which was meant to show such scorn of his power to disturb his entertainers that they could afford to make light of all the information he might gather in their company. Information being what he had come to seek, George garnered his rich harvest and bore patiently with the delays incurred in so doing.

He was immensely interested in all he saw, this journey carrying him far beyond the limits of his former explorations. By the time he had reached Fort Lebœuf, the final object of his mission, his train was swelled by a number of Indian chiefs, whom he had reattached to British influence and carried away from Venango, where they had been the subject of a lively contest between himself and the French authorities there. They did not make much impression on Monsieur de St. Pierre, when he beheld them acting as escort to the young major, who demanded, with such fine confidence, that France should retire from her point of

vantage, and content herself with territory that was not clearly the property of her neighbour. Having the grand waterway of the Mississippi to put him in direct communication with New Orleans on the South, as well as a whole French frontier along Lake Ontario into Canada on the north, it was not likely that the Commander of Fort Leboeuf would pay more than a polite and abstracted attention to the commands of Governor Dinwiddie far away on the Atlantic coast. Nothing could then have seemed more unlikely to the Chevalier de St. Pierre than that the distant, rich, unwarlike Virginians should ever dislodge him by force of arms. He smiled at their pretensions, and was surprised to find that the Indian chiefs who had been gained to the American (or, as it was then called, the British) side at Venango, remained faithful to it even under the fire of his own persuasive eloquence at Fort Leboeuf. He trusted that the Indian interest could be recaptured later, when the handsome, impressive young ambassador should have been sent back across the Alleghanies once more, and, while composing his letter to Governor Dinwiddie, was quite as willing that George should inspect his impregnable position as the officers at Venango had been to let him take notes of theirs. Major Washington and his note-book were negligible quantities in French eyes just then.

George had forgotten that the Chevalier's little official family comprised two individuals whom he had once seen for an hour or two in his mother's house. Emerging from the apartment which had been assigned to him in the rough place, he was unpleasantly surprised by finding himself suddenly involved in the embrace of a tearful old gentleman, very brown and thin, who insisted on kissing him on both cheeks before he declared his identity. As George realized that Van Braam, standing behind him in the doorway, was exploding with laughter (out of the lather of soap-suds in which he was enjoying his first shave for a month), the young man got very red, and decidedly, though courteously, pushed his assailant from him, trying to remember whether he had ever seen him before.

"You do not remember me, heartless youth?" exclaimed the old admiral, looking up to heaven in despair. "Nay, how could I expect that you should? Fame, youth, love, are, of course, blowing their fanfares in your ears. You have forgotten the poor old man who was privileged to support your noble mother through the anguish of her first separation from her eldest son."

"Well," said George, slowly, "I will not say that, sir. Your

face I now recollect, but I fear that I am so unfortunate as to have forgotten your name."

"So has my country—with more obligation to remember it," replied the admiral with a little gesture of despairing pardon. Then, the dramatic demands of the situation being satisfied, he slipped his hand through George's arm, and began to lead him across the courtyard to the room which served as dining apartment, council-hall, sitting-room, all in one. "My name, when I had one, was Kerensee," said the old man confidentially, "one of the best names in Brittany, my young friend—but we have no need of names here! I shall remain eternally a pensioner of your beautiful mamma's great kindness, and my heart is about to experience a heavenly consolation in discharging a small portion of the debt! To my intrepid courage in penetrating to these wilds you will owe the first Christian meal you have had since you left the maternal roof—for I take it that your last act before plunging into this mission of danger was to embrace your noble parent! Ah, do you smell that? Do you not pray that some kindly breeze will waft the fragrance to the borders of that unpronounceable river which flows by Madam Washington's house?"

They were now approaching a door by which stood a hungry-looking sentry, who presented arms hastily in answer to a portentous frown from George's conductor. From the opening came a pleasant savour of hot meats, garlic, and spices, grateful enough in those latitudes on a chilly November day, especially to the nostrils of a healthy, hard-worked young man who had been living on rough traveller's fare. Elizabeth McClintock came forward in her gentle way to do the honours of her cousin's house. She had not grown much older with the passing years. A tall, graceful woman, with beautiful hands, and sad, dark eyes, still dainty in her ways and in her simple dress, her appearance was a pleasant surprise to the young man, who had expected to find only men in this frontier fortress. Her presence gave a touch of homelike graciousness to the unlovely surroundings, and George unbent at once. Had she been twenty years younger, such an encounter would have tinged his stay with passing romance, in spite of a recent disappointment; as it was, there was something very pleasant in the sweet, feminine presence of a charming woman. It softened the asperities of intercourse with entertainers who were adversaries, if polite ones; and it provided just that touch of personal interest in the circle which is needed to enable a man to show himself at his best.

When dinner was over, and the autumn day drawing in, chilly

as any winter one in Virginia, George, in response to a low-spoken invitation from Elizabeth, came out with her on the glacis which surrounded the fort, and they strolled up and down, watching the winter sunset dying out in the unknown west.

"Are you not terribly lonely here, madam?" inquired George, kindly, looking down at the delicate face which showed out so pale from its dark, furred hood.

"No," she replied, and out here away from the others, her voice sounded ghostly faint yet clear. "I am not more lonely here than elsewhere. Life is lonely—for some people, Mr. Washington."

He remembered some vague facts that he had heard about her, of a dead husband who had been much loved. But that was not a misfortune which had happened to her alone. There was his own mother—but of course other women were not so courageous or unselfish as she. Still, this attitude of Mrs. McClintock was morbid, and George could feel pity, but no sympathy for it.

"If you lived in some pleasant place," he said stoutly; "with friends to visit you and—and all the things that ladies do like, you would of a certainty be much happier, madam. Why do you remain in this forlorn spot so long? May I not offer you an escort back to the east? It would give me the greatest pleasure to be of service to you."

"You are very kind, sir," she said, looking up at him with sudden gratitude, but I cannot come. My poor uncle nearly died on the way hither, and, as I verily believe only survived the hardships of the journey through his intense desire to say that he had performed it. He can never do so again. Here he will remain for the few years he may have to live. Oh, Mr. Washington," she cried suddenly, "they say we are safe, quite safe; but I am often afraid. Afraid of those terrible Indians—afraid, oh, very much afraid of you and your people."

"Afraid—of us?" repeated George in amazement. This was a sentiment quite unshared by any adversaries he had met as yet. Virginia's credit was all to make, even in his eyes.

"Ah, but I have seen," Elizabeth went on. "I have seen your people and your country! You are not mere farmers and traders, without spirit, without pride, as the chevalier and my countrymen deceive themselves into believing. I have seen your great ports and the many ships, your prosperous towns—your fine young men and beautiful women! Such people make soldiers, and brave soldiers too, if you disturb them in their rights."

"Yes," said George, remembering his quality of representative, "that is what I have come to say, but the Chevalier seems to find it difficult to believe. Will you not help me to make it clear to him, madam?"

"*Mon ami*," she said confidentially, "there are two classes of men who never listen to a woman's opinions on any serious matter—the imbeciles and the geniuses! Call my good cousin which you please. He blesses me because I can cook a little, and if I speak of other things silences me by saying that statesmanship has nothing to do with the *pot-au-feu*."

"I hope you will not think me wanting in respect for your sex, madam," said George, grandly, "if I venture to say that you ladies should not be put in positions where your opinions on matters of State, be they right or wrong, can be of importance to the persons who guide them. A woman's happiness does not lie in such a sphere. Although I am a young man, and but slightly known to you, I entreat you to withdraw from it in time."

Mrs. McClintock was silent for a moment; then she shook her head. She and George were standing by a little earthwork bastion, which was the innermost protection of Fort Leboeuf on its western side. Towards them the wind came howling down from Arctic spaces, icy with its passage over Canadian wilds and frozen lakes. The sun had gone, leaving crimson bars against a cold, green sky. The black pine forests stretching away to Lake Erie seemed utterly devoid of life.

"No," said Elizabeth; "I must stay here. However far I travel east, the sun will not rise for me again. Here I can feel that I am of some use to my poor uncle, to my cousin, St. Pierre. But when you come, Mr. Washington, with arms and troops and cruel cannon—as you must some day—be a little merciful to us if you can! I am not sure you do not owe me that for your dinner!" And she laughed in her own impersonal, soundless way.

"I shall always owe it to a charming, kind lady," said George, smiling down at her. "And you may be sure, madam, that it will be only a pleasure to remember the obligations. But I trust that all these questions will be amicably settled."

"I fear not," she said. "Now let me show you what I can while the daylight lasts. I am not so afraid of your great notebook as I am of cannon and Indians, you see."

She was the last person to bid him farewell when he took his departure, carrying the chevalier's letter of refusal to budge in one pocket, and a mass of notes in another. He had seen everything,

and had written down everything, so that in the case of any accident to himself on the return journey the papers he carried would give the governor all necessary information whenever they should reach him.

Elizabeth came running down the road as he moved away with Van Braam and his other followers. He turned his horse and rode back a few yards to speak to her. She stood by his bridle, and fastened a little Indian basket to his halter.

"There is some fine cordial," she said, "which we brought from a monastery in France, and my last pieces of French chocolate. You are going to have a terribly cold journey, *mon enfant*. God bring you safe to your mother at the other end of it."

"I will tell her of your goodness, dear madam," said George, taking the delicate hand and bowing from the saddle till it touched his lips. "You have taught me one of your pretty speeches—*au revoir*—but I hope that will come in happier circumstances and more hospitable country. All good be with you till then."

He rode away in the morning sunshine, and Elizabeth watched his little train till it was out of sight among the trees. Her heart had gone out to the handsome, soldierly young man, with his courtly manners, his steady eyes, and ringing, powerful voice.

"Ah, *la bien heureuse!*" she mused, thinking of his mother. "Had I had a son, how fair life would still have been for me! This boy should be a king—and our people make light of him. When he returns there will be trouble. Now I must go and see what I can give my dear, stupid men for their dinner."

The return journey was a terrible experience for George and his companions. The winter had set in with terrible severity, and the country was deluged in icy rain. Tracks were obliterated, streams had become swollen torrents where they were not almost impassable on account of the ice. The travelling became impossible for horses, and these had to be abandoned, the little party covering great distances on foot, seriously hampered by the loss of stores and weapons which had been perforce left behind with the horses who carried them. The adventure came near ending in a tragedy, through the treacherous attack of some Indian allies of the French, who lay in wait for the Americans and tried to murder them. George would not even punish the miscreant he captured, but let him go, his own natural scorn of danger combined with his conviction that it was better to show contempt than vindictiveness where the plan had not originated with those who were entrusted to carry it out.

After numberless perils, the most disagreeable of which was certainly the narrow escape from drowning which he encountered on finding himself flung from his rude raft into an ice-laden river, George reached home towards the end of December, and stopped two days at Pine Grove before taking his report to Williamsburg. His mother's joy at his safe return was sadly tempered by the vivid realization of all he had gone through. Thinking lightly enough of it himself, he kept nothing back from his account. Seeing how it impressed her, he tried, however, to turn her mind from his past perils by the description of the old admiral's outpourings and the pleasant surprise he had felt on finding Mrs. McClintock at Fort Leboeuf.

"Poor thing!" said Mary; "what a terrible life for any woman!" But she was glad that George should have met with such a kindly influence in the house of his enemies.

"That is over now, my son, is it not?" she said anxiously. "You have seen how useless such remonstrances are in the face of the strong position of the French. That will have to be accepted now, surely? You need never cross the Alleghanies again on such a fruitless mission."

"Madam," replied George rather sternly, "I hope, with the Governor's permission and the country's support, to repeat that journey until there are no French robbers to be found at the other end of it! Do you realize that they hold the country from Quebec to New Orleans with scarcely a break, and that they mean to add our narrow strip of coast to their domains? We should be fighting all along the line now if I had my way, and we could find troops to cover it. An enemy at the door is bad enough; but a victorious one in the house means the annihilation of the owners."

"Oh, why cannot all men be just and peaceful?" sighed Mary.

"Because we have not got to heaven yet, dear madam," laughed her son, "and, to tell you the truth, though I fear it will shock you, some of us would like to see a little fighting here first!"

It seemed to Mary at this time as if the love of arms, having found a stronghold, sorely against her will, in her own family, were spreading round her in some mysterious manner, entirely beyond her power to combat. Young Robin McClean had been with her but the day before, wild with delight at the promise of a commission which had been obtained for him, and which he hoped to receive in the course of the next few months. What possible use the Service could have for an officer fifteen years of age was a question

which no one thought of asking. Boys younger than that were already in the field.

"I suppose the poor children must be inured to it early," said Mrs. Washington to Hector, in discussing Robin's future, "otherwise they could never be hardened to the monstrous injustice and cruelty of war. Robin at least has no mother whose heart shall be broken with anxiety for his life in war, and his soul in peace! God only knows with what companions he will be thrown. I wonder you have not tried to turn his thoughts in other directions, Hector!" And she looked accusingly at Robin's kinsman, his aider and abettor in these unwisdoms.

"To tell you the truth, Mrs. Washington," said Hector, "'tis matter of regret with me sometimes that I did not do the like! I think all true men have some steel in their composition; and sweet as life may be following the plough, 'tis not complete but they have handled the other weapon betimes as well! I was a poor Scotch cadet, and had to work, as I did work, and gladly, at the chief's bidding. But right glad am I that the lad hath his sword-arm free, as a gentleman should; and for myself—Ian saith he having a fine Scots colony at Cray and needing me less than he did—I shall ask your son to let me follow him the next time he goes to discuss matters with the French! Ay, and 'tis faithfully I'd be serving him too, for your sake and his father's, dear lady!"

Hector's devotion always touched Mary deeply. It gave all and asked nothing. She felt towards him no uneasy sense of responsibility, such as that of which she could not quite rid herself regarding Robin. Her care, her spiritual guardianship, as it were, had been claimed for the boy, and yet she felt able to do very little for him. She had the sense of being set to stand by and watch the development of his destiny, helpless to aid or hinder them, though she prayed that the few words she was able to say to him from time to time on important subjects might not be altogether forgotten when he should have left the home which was so near to hers.

In some ways the atmosphere of that home was not good for the boy; naturally imperious and self-willed, in spite of his warm heart and somewhat dreamy nature, the deference he received even from Ian and Hector, as son of the Chief, was not calculated to strengthen the weak places in his armour. To Mrs. Washington it appeared absurd and incredible that grown men, his close relations, should treat Robin as if he were the heir to a throne, immeasurably divided from them and the rest of mankind by his claim to the

shadowy honours of future chieftainship. They thought little indeed of the courtesy title which was his due, but seemed to perceive in him a creature set apart by Divine right to be, after his father, the greatest personage of their world. The first place at the simple table at Cray, the precedence in other houses where they visited with him, was always granted to Robin; and Mary had more than once remonstrated with him privately for using to his cousins a tone which appeared to her lacking in proper deference from a junior to his seniors.

"But 'tis right, madam," he protested; "when my father dies I shall be Chief, and they must take orders from me, as all the Clan is bound to do! Their being my cousins makes no change in that obligation! When I am an officer I can raise a regiment of McCleans if I like; and woe to the man who stays in his home when the Chief bids him out and fight! The very women would drive him out with sneers and curses till the wretch would have to follow the pibroch or starve!" And he laughed happily, thus proclaiming his power.

"But," said Mary, looking grave, "it was not for that your father sent you to America. The times are changed in Scotland, and the old order is dying out. He wished you to be a good and useful man, living at peace and bettering the world. Robin, you have a fair inheritance here—surely that should keep you occupied and content?"

"Has it kept Major Washington occupied and content?" asked the young rebel. "What is good enough for him is fine worth for any man, isn't it now, ma'am?" And he smiled into her face with a humorous light in his blue eyes. He knew Madam Washington's weak spot, and was besides a devout admirer of the splendid young major.

But Mary was grave as she answered, "You have not George's principle nor his experience, Robin; and it is unseemly that you should venture to compare yourself with him. Besides, he did not enter the army at fifteen. You have much to learn, my poor boy; and you will never learn it there."

Robin was not accustomed to home truths, and liked them little; Mrs. Washington's candour was as disagreeable as it was wholesome. He took his leave with some appearance of offence, and she did not see him again for two or three weeks.

When the spring days came, Mary began to go over many of her little possessions with that undefined sense of wishing to catalogue the impressions of an epoch which comes to thoughtful persons from time to time as the years pass by. In the house

made with hands, the house which they inhabit, things outlive their uses, and must be put aside or given away; the cherished cradle and sacred little garments are taken from their places in the old nursery, and go to minister to the comfort of the children of their old possessors. The few toys and spelling-books are packed up with the house-mother's long unused finery, and sent off to daughter and grandchild; the baby-chairs that have stood so many years in their accustomed corners, reminding the lonely woman of the days of busy, happy young motherhood, go with them. And with these material vestiges of ended youth, go a thousand sweet recollections, dangerous for her to cherish. The last son is almost a man, solitude is creeping upon the mother whose mothering is done, she must arm herself to meet it, and make friends with it in her almost deserted house. There is but one more spring after that, and not earth will give her its bloom.

So, silently and lovingly, Mary despoiled herself of many little things which had been the companions of her pilgrimage. Furniture and linen, lace and silver, all the articles of value she possessed were sent to Kenmore, where Betty accepted them with light-hearted gratitude, after the manner of beloved daughters. The rooms at Pine Grove were left somewhat bare, but then, as Betty cheerfully remarked, "Mamma has no company now, and it gives her less gear to be careful for." Little by little, Mary had been assuming a very ascetic habit of life. Taken on at first from a conscientious desire to economize all possible resources for her children's future, it had become the most natural and easy thing to deprive herself of all superfluities for their sakes. She had received the reward which comes to courageous persons, in the wonderful simplification induced in life by the absence of unnecessary complications. Her almost conventual dress admitted of but one change; the black woollen stuff was laid aside, and the black brocade donned for occasions of ceremony, the muslin cap exchanged for one of lace. Her table was frugal in the extreme; through her exquisitely kept rooms the winds might blow without encountering many obstacles. The few house-servants waited devoutly on their widowed mistress, jealous for her comfort and the honour of the family, and hoping always that they might live to see some return of the grand times gone by.

Mary looked forward with steady glance, and saw that in all probability a long period of life still lay before her. She was not yet fifty, her superb health had preserved her vitality undiminished, her calm beauty unspoilt, and she was minded to order her life now as it should continue to the end. She had reached the point

where she could cease to look back. The intense interest in her children's careers lay along the same road whither her inner thoughts were tending. The future, dear, precious, certain, held all for her now. Beyond her dreams for her dear ones' prosperity and success began to shine, soft and steady, the vision of her own hereafter, and she was satisfied with both. The increasing reality of her trust in God robbed her passing anxieties about George of their worst sting. It was well for her that she thus laid in stores of strength and patience before the time, now close at hand, when those anxieties were to assume proportions which would have otherwise proved unbearable. She thought that her days of conflict were over; she was in reality being prepared for long, terrible, enduring strain.

CHAPTER III

IT was early April, and Mary had not heard from George for three or four weeks. His last letter had brought the news of his promotion to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel of a Virginian regiment, a promotion in which Mary saw but the promise of new and arduous service for him. She had grieved sincerely at the death of Lawrence's young widow and her child, but had drawn some consolation from the secret hope that George would find in the property he inherited from them an inducement to settle down to the safe and quiet life of a country gentleman. No such thoughts were in his mind, however, and his mother realized, with regretful pride, that he had given too fine proof of his ability already to make the Governor willing to dispense with his services. On this soft, spring day, as she moved about the garden which was her greatest joy, a sense of apprehension was upon her, which all the sweetness of fresh, green leaf and bursting blossom could not dispel. The great lilac-bushes were tossing their pale amethyst clusters against the deep blue sky, the apple trees were domes of rosy bloom. In the fair set borders the hyacinths stood up straight and demure, sheaves of waxen white, and pink, and purple, like dainty maids in feast-day raiment, while nodding daffodils and jonquils bent towards them like gay gallants whispering sweet nothings in their ears. The trained arbours of box and cedar were all veiled in a network starred with white and yellow jessamine buds, the early roses shone velvet in the sun, and in shady beds the little lilies nodded away their perfume on the breeze.

Mary stood still as she came out under a trellised arch of multiflora roses, beyond which a long pleached walk made a way of sunshot greenery most fair to see.

"God forgive me," she said to herself. "How can any faithful heart be sad in such a world of beauty? Yet I am sad to-day." She pulled down one of the full, pink clusters, and

inhaled its faint perfume. Then she let it go, and it swung back far above her head, to wave against the blue. "Can it be that one does outgrow the roses?" she thought, as she watched the petals fluttering in sun and breeze. "They are sweet, but oh! how far less sweet than in the happy years."

Then she glanced towards the house, and saw Hector McClean coming towards her, looking sadly troubled, and at once fear came over her that some harm had befallen Robin, the child who was none of her own and yet had grown so dear.

"What is it, Hector?" she asked as he approached, all common greeting forgotten at sight of the sorrow in his face.

"Oh, Madam Washington," he answered, hastening towards her, "'tis sair ill news we've got. The Chief is awa'."

"Away?" said Mary, to whom the Scotch phrase did not convey his meaning. "I do not understand, Hector."

"Dead," he cried; "the Chief is dead, God gi'e him shrift and peace! And the lad Robin, that's the Chief this day, is greeting like a bairn, for a' he hasna seen his father these three years an' mair. Will ye no come to him, madam? He's calling bitter for his father, and we cannot comfort him."

But Mary seemed hardly to have heard the last words. She was looking at Hector, indeed, but she saw not him, but the man who had died in Scotland, one time her enemy, now lifted by Death, the great Absolver, away from human suffering and reproach. There was silence in the garden for a moment. The roses danced in the sunshine overhead, the lilacs flung a petal or two down on Mary's hair. Her heart had gone out after the lonely, sorrowing soul, winging it on its way with a sigh and a prayer.

She turned her head away, and laid her hand on Hector's arm.

"Come," she said, leading him to a garden seat, "tell me about him. I knew him, Hector."

The man was touched at the grave sympathy in her voice.

"Ah, he was grand," he cried, with a sort of ardent reverence, "the good Chief, the kind kinsman to Ian and me and all of us! Will you be finding it too much trouble to read the letter, Madam Washington? 'Twill tell you what I have no heart to say."

She bowed her acquiescence, and he placed a letter in her hands. "'Tis from James Ferries, that was cousin to him," he said. Then he sat, staring out at the flaunting beauty of the Virginian garden, while Mary Washington read how death had come to Robin McClean in Duart.

Ferries's letter was addressed to Ian, and ran thus—

"HONOURED KINSMAN,—

"To me, James Ferries, falleth the task of Imparting news of so Distressing a Nature that I would gladly make it over to a more competent Writer and one less Touch'd by the present adversity which hath fallen upon our Family, but being next-of-kin, and having by some strange dispensation been a Witness of the Circumstances to be Related, no choice remaineth to me but to Fulfil a clear Duty. Cousin, I am no fine Writer and I tell you Plainly I am too much Distressed to Beat about the Bush. In Strict order this Letter should be addressed to the Chief, for such is now the young Lad committed to your Charge. His father is dead. Seeing the boy's youth, I have Thought Fit to apprise you of the case, and entrust to you the Task of telling the McClean of his loss. It occurred in this Wise.

"Some two months since, I did come to Duart upon my Cousin's invitation, the more readily accepted for that being terribly Plaged with Gout, I sought occasion to Dispense myself from Duties at the Court which were more Painful than Lucrative since the Demise of Her late Majesty, who had ever shown me unexampled kindness. Pretending a sad story of Family misfortune (and the Devil Take me if e'er I do the Like again, having had my lie Taken and made Verity with distressing Promptness by Relentless Destiny) I obtain'd the Dismissal I sought, and Hastened away to the North, hoping in a change of climate to find Ease for my Distemper. On my arrival in this Forbidding Place, much shaken by hideous Discomforts and vile food on the Way, I found my late kinsman and Chief to meet me very kind, and proportionately grateful for all I had Put up with to reach him. He had good appearance of Health, being not Bowed nor feeble, but amazed me by finding him White headed that was a year younger than myself that is a young proper man still. We had not met since Before the Late King died, and Robin was then Less gay than me, but more Dangerous. He was Right glad to see me, and soon divulged the Reason of his Request. By some Gift, as he did pretend to explain (But I think more like by affection of Spleen induced by the Mortal Dreariness of these Solitudes), he Informed me that he had not Long to live, and would Have his poor Cousin Present at his obsequies, more by Token he but lived on his land by Complaissance of the McCallum More,* to Whom by Indebtedness in part, by Intrigue Cabal and Rapacity in whole, these estates are presently owned. So that the poor Lad in America cometh into

* The Duke of Argyll.

a Name unaccompanied by Heritage. The McClean was so Indulgent as to explain That my Part in the approaching Catastrophe must Be to see one Chief not robbed of his Rightful resting-place, and the next if Possible put in Possession of some Portion of his own Property. To me, that would have laughed in his face at these Dismal Forebodings, there Came Hellish Pains of gout in that moment so that I cursed him and Went to my Bed. For this I did much Reproach myself after.

"Me being in a Few Days recovered, I did begin to go about with Him, and laughed Heartily at some strange Habits he had contracted, the Fruit of long Living far from Congenial Society. Every poor Person far and near appear'd to acquaint him with their Troubles, and much money he gave away to Help them. I told him Plainly that an' 'twere money claimed by the McCallum More I could but applaud such Spending, But if, as it seemed, it were Rightly his own, he was calling aloud upon Insolvency. 'Nay, James,' he said, 'I have a Fat sum of mine own which Thou shalt take away with Thee for a Legacy, my Poor Son suffering naught thereby, having enough and to Spare from his Mother's Tocher and Long Provision made by me. This that I give these Poor Folk is to ease my soul when I go Hence.' Not content with such extravagances of Virtue, the Chief had taught himself such Peculiar tenderness for animals in Suffering that I was amazed and fear'd his Reason must be in Course of Dissolution. If he found the Children of the Hamlet sporting with some sick or suffering Beast as Children will, he reprimanded them with such Severity that they Desisted and Fled from him. Nor was this Sufficient for his unnatural Sensibility, for he would bring the wretched quadruped up to the Castle and care for its ease as if it had been a Fellow Being until it was Recovered. Alas, this Weakness caused our Poor Cousin's Death. And if I have so long delayed in Describing the Sad event, believe me 'twas because it requireth all my Courage to Transcribe it in Words. We were Lads together, and I felt a great affection for the Chief. But here and now it must come. Yet I pray your use of gentleness in telling the boy Robin, or Tell him not of the manner, 'twill be better still.

"It was some three weeks Before Christmas, and Mighty Cold, a great Snow Storm raging, and the Strait a Churn of Foam that seemed Rising to Swallow us up. Me sitting in all the clothes I had, and not warm at that, Before the Hall fire, and thinking some regretfully of my Snug room in St. James's Palace; Robin walking up and Down the hall like a great white-haired

Hound, that paceth and Listeneth to Things None should hear.

"'For God's sake, sit down, Cousin!' I cried, Peevishly enough I fear. 'Are you waiting for all the boggarts in the Hielands to chap at the Door? Man, if ye glower and hark that gait ye'll drive me to get Drunk—and then it's the Gout and the Devil for me till the Weather shall change, and that'll no be this side of Christmas!'

"'Whisht, Jamie,' says he, stopping in his walk, 'Did ye no hear the wee cry?' And he listens, his eyes shining dark and glad, that I was affrighted to look at them. Ay, and I heard it clear. A thin ghost of a cry of something in Pain, out there in the hurling snow.

"'Tis forbye the Door,' says he, and he goes striding down to the door at the far end of the Hall, and me after him like Lightning.

"'Hold yer Hand, Robbie,' says I, 'tis no good Thing, and ye'll not open to it with me by.' Come back to the Fire, man, and have a Dram.' For I felt as if we two were going mad together.

"'Ah, laddie,' says he, smiling wise and strange, 'Had ye been where I've been there's naught could Fright ye save Leaving a Thing in its Pain. And a Vow is a Vow,' says he, and with that he opens the door. In comes a skirl of snow and sleet with all the winds of hell in its Train, and out of the blinding whiteness there limps in a small, starved cat, with one leg a bloody stump, and goes crawling like a black streak towards the fire, leaving its mark on the stones all the way up the Hall. Robin stands staring at it. 'Shut the door, ye crazy chiel!' says I, for the snow was in after the blood, 'and throw the creature on the Fire to end its Sufferings! Faith I've got an Ague already.' For my teeth were chattering and I was angry.

"He never heeded me, but went slowly up the hall In Those ugly tracks, and 'twas me that forgot to shut the Door, but went after him, Fearing I knew not what. When I got back to the fire the McClean was kneeling on the hearth, stroking the creature that Began to bristle and purr in the Warm, and stopped to lick its shorn leg.

"'Caught and Trapp'd,' mutters Robin; 'caught and Trapp'd in the Devil's Gin, and broken away, crippled and maimed, poor Thing!' And with That he puts out his Hand to Stroke it again, and the Creature turns and sets its Teeth in the Hand, as the Devil had sent it to Do, I have now no doubt. Robin Sprang

up, and I would Have kicked the Creature, but 'twas out and away again with its horrid cry, and the door slapped to in the gale. I Thought Robin mad enough to go after it, but He was standing quiet, looking at the small, Clean Bite and talking to Himself. I heard no Word, but saw his lips Moving. In a Blink I had an ember on the pick, and caught his hand to me and burnt the place, he smiling a bit dazed and looking at the seething Flesh as if it were not his. Then I wrapped a cloth, damped in spirits, round to keep the cold out, and that's a pain would make a brave man shriek, but he said Nothing.

"'Now to your Bed, Robbie,' says I, 'and ye'll have forgotten these cantrips the morn! There'll no harm come to you; we burnt it in time.'

"'Burnt in time,' says he, very gentle. 'Thank you, Jamie. We must sleep now.'

"Ah, How shall I Relate the rest, good kinsman? After a day or two I forgot to ask after his hand, that seemed to hurt him Little, but on the ninth Day he Began to Be sore Sick, and at evening I found Him on his bed, Twisted in Agony, Speechless, glassy-eyed—he found Strength to sign to me to keep far off. When it Passed, and he could speak Words, he Said, 'Come not near, Cousin—in the Fit I might Cause you Hurt,' but gouty and Sore afraid of Sickniss as I am, I Found courage to Assist him When not one of the People save a poor Blind woman would come near him. Her heart gave her sight, for She had loved him when he was a lad, and she and me we Left him not, tho' Human Nature could scarce bear the Horror and Fear and sight of the Suffering, and him Writhing like a creature burnt alive and never so much as a moan passing his Lips that were so cruel parched 'twas appalling to behold. Praise God, he had an Hour of Peace at the Last. The Winds falling and the Sea becoming smooth, I did Despatch a messenger to the main Larfd for to Bring a Priest, no such Venture having been Practicable before. This Priest, Father Malcolm, an old man and holy, arriving t'w'rds Sundown, did Pray for the Chief, Whereupon the Torture departed from him and he was enabled to attend some ghostly exhortation and Be anneal'd tho' impeded from Receiving Viaticum by nature of the Dis-temper. When I was recall'd to the Chamber the Priest did kneel by his Side and the Chief had the Rood laid on his breast. He turns his head to me, and says, pretty Faint for Dryness and Death agony, 'Open the Window, James,' and I open'd it. 'Twas Christmas the Eve, but the air like Spring, the Sea calm and the moon at Full. The Chief Lies looking at it for a while, and then

Begins Talking to Himself in a composed manner, like a Child falling Asleep. I caught a Word or Two, here and there, something about 'The Shadow of the Lord,' and a name, 'Mary, Mary, Mary,' over and over again. Then I thought he was Asleep, for there was silence, but a puff of Breeze blew into the Room, and he opened his Eyes and Looked towards the Window, and spoke again. 'I cannot help you, but God will,' says he, and 'kind and true, Robin,' and then once the holy names, 'Jesu, Mary,' that was the end. Poor Cousin, Poor Robin, I did not know that any man's death could so grieve me. The blind woman and me, James, put him in his coffin, the Priest helping us, all others being afraid. He Lieth beside his Father, tell the Chief, and the McCallum More has sworn to me they shall never be Disturbed. Of all other Businesses I will approach you later, Dear Kinsman, my mind being now much affected By the which I have Witnessed.

"Your Loving Cousin to Command,

"JAMES FERRIES."*

Long was the letter, and long it took in the reading. When it was ended Mary rose and walked away from her companion, down the flowery garden paths. Hector never moved, but waited for her to return. When she came back towards him, the tears were coursing down her cheeks, and she knew it not.

"I will come to the boy," she said. "Will it please you to come in and have some refreshment while the coach be made ready?"

Hector rode at her side, and they hardly spoke till the gates of Cray were thrown open for them to pass through. The soft spring dusk was falling when Hector helped Mary to alight at the door of the house. She had not been there since the day she brought her husband away from it, nearly sixteen years before.

"This is kind of you, madam," said Hector. "I know you can have no pleasant memories of this place."

"I am glad to come, Hector," she replied gravely, and then Ian stepped forward to welcome her—Ian, little changed from the dark, silent man she remembered, erect and stiff as ever, but with a new look of anxiety on his face.

* Accompanying this letter was a bundle of manuscript in the late Lord Drumardlee's handwriting, the contents of which, while throwing much light upon his enigmatical character, have no place in this book. It is possible that at some future day they may be given to the public.

"We thank you much, madam, for this kindness, as for all you have shown till now," he said as he led her into the hall; "the bad news has thrown the Chief into a sort of fever, and we fear a sickness."

The place was less bare than when Mary had seen it. The pine table, on which some rapiers had lain on that memorable night, had been replaced by a heavy oaken one; there were oak settles round the walls, and these were decorated with a few old claymores and shields, an antlered deer's head, and other trophies of the chase.

Hector led her into the room which Augustine had occupied. Young Robin was lying in a low bed, a dark plaid thrown over him, his face turned to the wall, and his red-gold hair scattered over the pillow. He was asleep. With gentle care Hector placed a chair for Mrs. Washington beside the bed, and withdrew, closing the door noiselessly after him. Mary sat silent beside the sleeping boy, her thoughts going back to other scenes and times. The undertow of Destiny's moving tide throws strange wreckage on Life's strand.

At last Robin stirred, threw his hand out on the plaid, and turned his head with an impatient movement towards her who watched him. His eyes opened wide, and he stared at her, uncomprehending. Mary took the smooth, boyish hand in her own, and pressed it silently, while her eyes met his with a glance of sorrowful sympathy. Robin suddenly raised himself and flung himself into her arms with a cry, his coverings dragging on the floor. And on her shoulder he sobbed like a child, she holding him to her in a motherly embrace. He had but little self-control, and she wisely let him weep some of his grief away.

At last she spoke. "My dear," she said, over the young head that lay against her, "he loved you much, and he made a good end. We must thank God for that last, and pray that we may all do the same."

"But I would have seen him again," moaned Robin. "I never thought not to see him again! I was bad and wilful often, and he was so good to me! And when I was with you that day I spoke of being Chief when he should die—he was dead then, dead then! and I had no love and no pity—I cannot bear it!"

Mary smoothed the tossed hair, and tried to comfort Robin McClean's son. "You must not say that, my boy; I am assured that you have always loved him. You spoke in pride and carelessness, perhaps, but I knew the words came not from your heart.

"Tis thus with all of us, my dear, when our loved ones do go from us. We remember what they have forgotten—our unwilling shortcomings towards them. They remember, be sure of it, Robin, what we forget—love and kindness that we showed them as the breath of our hearts, always! The rest was but an accident of human weakness, and is quite forgotten there! Your father will tell you so when you see him again."

"I shall never see him again," the lad replied, suddenly tearing himself away from his comforter, and burying his face in the pillow.

"Oh yes, with God's blessing you will, Robin," said Mary, because she felt that it should be said. But she was too truthful not to remember how little immediate ease such promises had given her in her own sorrow. Such speeches always seem to bring more consolation to those who pronounce than to those who hear them.

She was startled by Robin's next words. He raised his head and looked at her with a great fear in his eyes. "You don't know—you can't understand—how bad I am—how alone—how wicked I feel!" he said, in a hoarse, scared whisper. "It's been on me for months. I was dreaming it the night before the letter came, lying awake in the dawn to remember, afraid the clear sunshine would take it away for ever. And he was dead all the time, and me never giving him a kind thought. Oh, surely 'twas I that killed him with my abominable thoughts. He knows now; they say the dead know all. God keep me from having to meet him now!"

The drawn face, the dark, feverish eyes, seemed to indicate delirium. Mary was alarmed, but spoke with calm authority. "My dear Robin, I do not think you are quite yourself. These agitations have made you ill. I am going to prepare a soothing draught, and when you have taken it you must try and sleep. You will be stronger and calmer to-morrow, and then I will see you again."

She rose, but he caught at her dress. "Do not go, oh, pray do not go! I was trying to tell you!" he whispered. "If I could tell somebody 'twould pass, perhaps, though I shall die if I lose it! You are the only one—stay with me, stay with me—*make* me tell you!" And he looked up at her with wild entreaty.

"Then you shall tell me," said Mary, humouring him, and thinking it best to take this imaginary trouble a little lightly. It was probably some scruple of conscience, she told herself, magnified into importance by coinciding with the shock of his

father's death. She had ascertained from Hector that the most painful details of that event had been kept from the lad. "Now," she said, smiling a little as she sat down and took his hand in hers, "what is it that has been troubling your mind? I will be your ghostly counsellor, my dear, and we will sweep it away between us."

"Don't look at me," said Robin, "I am thinking where to begin." He unloosed his fingers from her clasp, and folded his hands tightly together. Mary obediently turned her glance from his face towards the shadowy darkness of the well-remembered room. Then she became aware that he was speaking in a low, resolute voice, and she listened with a growing sense of the seriousness of his trouble.

"It began just before Major Washington returned from the frontier—in December. My father ~~must~~ have been a-dying then—and me knowing nought of it. In December I had dreams—sweet, exciting dreams—a lovely girl looking at me—taking my hand—that was all at first. I seemed to know her, but not the name. Then one night I knew it was Miss Carter—Teresa Carter, and—oh I can't go on, I can't go on!" His voice died away and he was silent.

Mary did not turn her head or look at him, but she put out her hand and laid it kindly on his hot, clasped ones. "Go on, Robin," she said, "'tis the braver part. And, child, the thing is but dream-stuff—others have suffered the like at your age. We will end it now!"

If others had suffered the like they had not told it with the passion, the regret, the equal love and horror of the temptation which this poor boy made bare to her. It was the story of obsession—the young, fiery, uncontrolled nature invaded and dominated at the critical moment of passing from early youth to manhood by the imagined presence of a woman who had amused herself for an evening by rousing the admiration of a schoolboy. Her beauty had become an enslaving reality, of which he dreamed asleep, for which he longed, awake. And with her the mistress of his dreams seemed to have brought knowledge, torment, regret. The young soul had made acquaintance with all these, and no forgetfulness would ever soothe it to the innocence of its childhood again.

Mary Washington, the wise mother of many sons, recognized the normal aspect of poor Robin's bewilderments fully enough. Leading a somewhat sequestered life, unaccompanied by sisters and girl-friends, his first impressions of women had not been early

schooled into healthy insensibility as had those of her own boys. Their many little love-affairs had been breezy with bright inconstancy, and the natural attraction offered by the feminine element in their daily lives had been too familiar and frank to affect them in any unwholesome way. With Robin it was different; and recollecting the lengths to which his father had been carried by the morbid tendencies of his nature—a nature fully inherited by his son—she realized that her sympathy with the son must take the form of sound sense and prompt action. The life at Cray was bad for him. Let him be removed from it to something more stirring. The ordinary temptations to be encountered in the world would be less dangerous for him than a solitude which invited these heats of imagination.

When Robin's story ended, his hands were cold, and Mary felt them trembling under hers. She turned now and looked in his face.

"That was hard to tell, Robin," she said, "but I am indeed glad that you have told it. Now I wish you to understand that I am in no way shocked or surprised, but only sorry that you did not come to me before. My dear, you are not a miserable criminal, as you have let yourself imagine. You have had too little to occupy your mind, and a somewhat idle life among monotonous surroundings has been very mischievous to your health and spirits. Although I did oppose it before, I see now that your entering the army will give you that which you most need—companionship and occupation. Throw all your thoughts forward to those things which do await you, and of which your poor father, wisely as I now perceive, did approve the choice for you. You must do him credit, you see, Robin, and, being so young and unlearned, that will take all your waking time, and I think I can promise that after healthy action will come healthy sleep, free from the phantoms that have disturbed you of late."

"How good you are, madam," he said. "I thank you for all your patience. 'Tis good to have spoken, and I could have done so to no one else."

"I know," she said soothingly; "now say your prayers and go to sleep like a good boy, for you know you are nothing else!" she added with a smile. "And to-morrow, if you are better, come over to Pine Grove for a few days. The change will do you good."

She stooped and kissed his forehead as if he had been her own child, and he looked up at her gratefully. Then she left him, and after a little talk with Hector, in which she surprised him

by advocating Robin's speedy entrance into the King's service, drove home to Pine Grove in the soft, spring night, a tired, saddened woman, thinking rather fearfully of her responsibilities towards the boy whom she had just left. His father's death had suddenly made those responsibilities assume very serious proportions ; and Lord Ferries's letter had wrung her heart with profound pity for the sorrows and sufferings of an erring and repentant fellow-being. Yet, ere she slept, she thanked God for that repentance, and prayed very earnestly for the welfare of the dead man's son.

CHAPTER IV

THE year 1754 brought to George two notable experiences—his first victory and his first defeat. The victory was but a skirmish, the defeat so minimized by his courage and judgment that he received a public vote of thanks for his services; yet he had tasted the sweets of success, the humiliation of disaster, and the savour of neither was easily forgotten.

The announcement of his second expedition to the frontier was brought by George to Pine Grove on the evening of the day when Mary had been to see Robin at Cray. She had barely been in the house an hour when George rode up to the door. Seeing her pale face, usually so bright at sight of him, he thought that the news of his having been named to lead a small force to the Ohio must have reached her already.

"My dear mother," he said, kissing her hand, "I fear you must be thinking me negligent in not having informed you of these events; but, indeed, I came in the first moment of liberty I could secure, and was anxious to tell you of them myself to avoid for you needless alarms. I entreat you to lay aside all anxiety for me till I return—as I shall, I am convinced, soon and safely."

"George, what is it?" she cried. "I have heard nothing," and her face became a shade paler. The letter from England had stirred her heart to the depths, and the distressing interview with poor young Robin had tried her exceedingly. For once her strong nerves were not quite under control.

"You have not heard, madam," said George. "I feared—you appeared troubled, shaken—alas! I know that what I have to tell will not be agreeable to you; but I am glad to tell it you myself, after all."

"What is it?" she asked again, trembling a little as she laid her hand on his arm. "You are going away again? To the Ohio? Oh, this fighting and killing! George, I pray, I implore you, not to go."

The perils of his first journey to Fort Leboeuf were vividly and constantly in her mind, and she had dreaded lest his courage and experience should be called upon again. Who was there who could replace him in such service? But the thought was horrible to her.

"Dearest madam," he said earnestly, "do you remember that we spoke of this thing after my return? I said then what I must say now, that if the country bids me travel to the Ohio in her service, I am resolved to obey until the matter is honourably settled, or I unable to serve her in it any longer. Mother, do not weep"—for Mary could not control her tears; "you, of all persons, have taught me the meaning of duty. Would you have me turn my back on it now?"

She turned away to hide the emotion she could not conquer yet. This new blow had swept all other troubles from her mind.

George let her cry silently for a moment; he was touched at the strength of her affection for him, and deeply pained at having to distress her.

"Mother," he said, at last, "twice and thrice have I returned to you safe and sound, from equal perils encountered under far less favourable conditions. I go now with troops and arms, and every step of the way is familiar to me. The Almighty, who heard your prayers for me before, will not turn a deaf ear to them now."

Then Mary raised her head, with some of the old brave light in her eyes.

"No, He will not," she said. "You shame me, dear son. No Christian should thus rebel. My boy, my dearest boy," she went on, laying her hand on his arm with a caressing gesture, and showing him her sweet eyes full of tender hope, "God is our sure trust—to Him I commend you."

They lingered in sober, loving talk awhile, Mary listening calmly now to the details of his arrangements for the expedition.

"I doubt I cannot return to say another farewell, dear madam," he said at last, "every moment of my time will be occupied in gathering recruits and preparing for the march. You shall have news of me whenever it shall be possible to send it."

"I know," she said. "No, do not think of another visit here, my son. It but makes it harder. Come back to me when your labours are over. I can wait till then. God be with you."

He wrote her a note of loving and cheerful farewell just as he was setting out from Alexandria * with two companies of men—

* Now the capital, Washington.

raised with the greatest difficulty—to offer battle to the French wherever he could persuade them to accept it. He had resolved on this course, risky as it appeared, for two reasons, the first being the imperative necessity of making some demonstration to convince the enemy that serious opposition was at least intended; the second, the belief that when a handful of men had thus been flung into the conflict, their timid and dilatory companions, the main body of the Virginian army, now hanging back irresolutely, would be shamed into following and assisting them; in other words, George decided to force the situation.

On the morning of his departure from Alexandria, when, heated, weary, yet persistent, he was parading his half-drilled, badly armed recruits, talking, scolding, encouraging them, all at once, in order to keep them from casting too intelligent glances at the sadly deficient ammunition and provision waggons, which were all he had been able to obtain, to his surprise and delight he saw Major Satterthwaite canter up on a huge raw-boned horse, pause at a little distance from the lines, and peer round for their commander.

George was at his side in a moment, shaking the Major's big hard hand with enthusiastic cordiality.

"This seems too good to be true, sir," he said. "How did you know I was here? Are you so generous as to wish to come with us?"

Satterthwaite dismounted slowly and stiffly. He had ridden the better part of the night.

"Yes, I'm coming with you, George," he said—"that is, if you'll have me. You are in command, my boy, and you'll find me a mighty obedient recruit. I don't think much of the stuff you seem to have got together." Here he cast a disapproving eye on George's shambling, discontented-looking warriors. "But, maybe, as a drill-sergeant I can be of some little assistance."

"I am overwhelmed at your kindness, my dear Major," said George; "who would have dreamed that you would go to such inconvenience, encounter the disagreeables which a young man must accept and make light of, but which an older one may regard as a part of his early education, useful in its day, but not to be repeated save under stern necessity! Were I generous enough, I would still dissuade you, but I lack such self-denial!"

The sight of the Major's kind, ugly face, with its twinkling eyes and big, hooked nose, had acted like a tonic on the young commander. His depression had disappeared, and he was laughing gaily.

"George," said his old friend, "I believe you have reached your present preferment without much encumbrance of historical knowledge—and the more credit to you for that, say I; but did you never hear of the heart of the Bruce?"

"I am afraid I have not," said George, quite humbly, "you see, I have had little leisure for elegant reading. Is it a poem? Hi, there," he called suddenly to a driver, "that near horse has got over the traces! What d——d careless fellows you are! Do you want those cases of powder kicked into an explosion?" The animal in question was plunging wildly, and his comrade was preparing to follow suit. When order was restored, George turned to Satterthwaite, saying: "Pray excuse the interruption, Major. The same thing has happened three times this morning, and I fear my temper is getting somewhat short. Now come and have a bit of breakfast. You will find one old acquaintance at least—Van Braam is with me. And then, when we ride away, you can divert my mind from these brainless, round-shouldered disabilities that I am preparing to lead into action by reciting the 'Heart of the Bruce.' I shall be much interested."

"It is not a poem, George," replied Satterthwaite, "but the act of a brave man, long dead, and by most forgotten. When the Douglas was fighting the infidels, he carried with him the heart of his brave dead king, in a silver casket, for a talisman. Hard pressed, fighting, despairing, he saw his men beaten back again and again. When all seemed lost, he took the heart from next his own and flung it with all his strength into the thickest ranks of the foe; then he leapt forward to reach it, and the rest went after him. They reached it, George."

"A brave deed," said George, his eyes kindling. "But what made you think of it now?"

"You," replied the Major very gravely. "Virginia is throwing the best she hath at her enemy. God send she follow to rescue it."

In the weeks that succeeded the departure from Alexandria, Major Satterthwaite watched the young commander with interest and approval which rapidly grew into respect. Harassed by every care that can beset the leader of lazy, unwilling recruits, ill armed and ill provisioned, on an expedition over difficult country, disappointed of promised reinforcements of men, horses, and waggons, George was everywhere at once, kept his temper and, what was more difficult, kept his men, for these were openly grumbling at their hardships and privations, and, while marching on under his compelling authority, cast as it were an eye over their shoulders to mark a safe method of escape from his inconvenient vigilance,

back to their homes. He had a moment of furious anger when, at Willis' Creek, he learnt that the fort he had induced the Government to build, on the important point of the junction of the Alleghany and Monongahela rivers, had been taken by the French, during the unauthorized absence of its commander, who, apparently weary of his duties, had left it, for a jaunt to Willis' Creek. The insult and the necessity of resenting it precipitated matters. George felt that he must act at once. He and his little force set out to find the French, without waiting for the reinforcements, of whose approach there was no sign. Day after day George marched on, the Major at his side, seeking for the enemy and praying inwardly that he might be met in some spot fairly fit for the encounter. Nearly a month passed before he took up his position at Great Meadows, hoping to draw the French to fight him on his own ground. They hovered near, scouting parties would appear and vanish again; then friendly Indians brought news of a great army on the march towards the place.

"This looks bad," said the Major. "It seems to me, George, that the heart may fail to be recovered this time. We are too few to have a chance in open fight."

"There is always one chance—where 'tis English against French," replied the young man, coolly; "but I have made up my mind to add another in my favour. I will surprise them if I can. We have good scouts among our Indians."

The two men were walking up and down under the trees which made a natural hedge at one end of the great stretch of grass-land which George had chosen with a loving eye for his first fight. He hated to leave it, but he could not venture nor take the risk of waiting to be attacked. As they turned in their walk an Indian girl shot out from between the trees and caught at George's arm. He looked down at her in surprise; she was holding out a little bag of leather embroidered, Indian fashion, with porcupine quills.

"Take it, Chief!" she said in the Shawanee dialect.

"Do you want me to buy it?" George asked, smiling at the pretty nymph, and feeling in his pocket for some trifle of bead or coin such as he usually carried in order to repay small services.

"The lady sent it," she said, "there are words in it."

George opened the little bag and found a closely folded note. He opened it slowly, while Major Satterthwaite remarked drily—

"Gad! you're in luck, young man. Love-letters here! The lady must be in a deuce of a fright about you."

But George suddenly turned to him, saying, "Here's news, Major. Read that, while I speak to her that brought it."

He put the note into the Major's hand, and began to talk to the girl in her own tongue. This is what Satterthwaite read :—

"*Mon pauvre ami*, do not despise me for wishing to save your life. It is for you and your mother that I do this, which my countrymen would call betrayal. But you shall not be betrayed. I have heard them talking. They will never fight you openly. If they meant to do that I would keep silence, except from prayers for your safety. They wait to fall upon you and murder you, saying that, you dead, there would be none to stay them. When they set out from this place, a girl who is faithful to me will follow them, as the Indian women do, to carry provisions. I have bidden her find and warn you when the moment of danger shall approach. When you receive this, my countrymen will not be far off. God shield you from harm, and forgive me if I fail in my duty to them.—E. M."

"God bless her, whoever she is!" said the Major, when he had finished. "Well, Colonel George, what do you propose to do?"

"Find these bold conspirators," replied George, laughing. "She says they are some fifteen miles off; but an Indian can never measure distances. It may be ten or twenty—beyond that second chain of hills, at all events." Then he turned to speak to the girl once more, but she was gone, as swiftly and silently as a bird on the wing. "So much the better," said George, "we want no women here. Now to find a few of our fellows who can enjoy an adventure! Thank Heaven, we may strike a blow at last!"

"In an hour he set out with two score men, the fittest he could find, with Satterthwaite and Van Braam at his side. The country was too rough for riding, so they took it on foot in light marching order. George was in his element, all his old frontier training serving him marvellously well in this quick, silent attack upon a skulking enemy who would not meet him in the open.

With increasing caution they finally approached a hollow in the hills whence a light spiral of smoke was rising. The French were but careless adversaries after all. They had evidently passed over the very ridge where the attacking party now halted to rest for a few minutes. Branches had been hacked away, and a few saplings felled to clear a road. A boot, split down the back, had been tossed into the grass close to them.

"Now men," said George, "are you ready? The fellows are but a few hundred yards off." Indeed, sounds of talk and a fragment of song met their ears as he ceased speaking.

"Le beau passeur du gué, la la !
Le beau passeur du gué."

It came quivering along, followed by a burst of laughter. The next sound was a cry, for the Americans were on the negligently guarded camp, and in an instant the hills rang to the cracking of the shots. An officer rolled over on his face among the ashes of the fire, a man fell here, another there ; the fighting was desperate for an instant—in the next it had ceased. Jumonville, the officer in command, lay dead at George's feet, half a score of men had fallen motionless in the grass ; the rest surrendered. There had been under forty in all, and but one got away to tell the tale.

George stood silent for a space, all elation gone. It had been so small, so easy, and the little bit of fighting seemed scarce an excuse for the death of an officer and ten good men. He had never killed before, and now he liked it not. All remembrance of what they would have done to him was gone for the moment, and he stood, staring down at Jumonville's corpse, with a strange sense of dissatisfaction. Van Braam took him by the arm.

"We must search this," he said, pointing to the dead captain. "There may be a dozen of his fellows out on the like quest. Belike he carries papers."

He did, papers which fully justified Elizabeth McClintock's letter and Colonel Washington's attack. George, recalled to his judgment at sight of these, was glad of what he had done. Jumonville and his comrades were buried as decently as the circumstances permitted, and the prisoners were marched back to the camp at Great Meadows. George wrote with some youthful elation about this, his first encounter. When the news had had time to travel, Colonel Washington was called a great man in Virginia, a bombastic young hero in London, and a villainous, murdering ruffian in France. He had won his first victory.

The defeat came two or three weeks later. The little advance force was by that time strengthened by the arrival of the men upon whom he had counted much earlier, but even with this addition the French, who were moving down to attack Fort Necessity, as Colonel Washington had christened the little fortress at Great Meadows, had a hundred men to every twenty-five of his own. These indeed laboured with good will at the trenches and earthworks which were needed to strengthen the place, for they were now convinced that their position was one of considerable danger. But they were worn out with marches, half-starved, and altogether in a very bad condition for the defence which would be needed to keep the position in their hands. George tried to

utilize their remnant of strength and their desperate desire to live, in an attempt to draw his assailants into an open fight outside the fort. But the French were not minded to fight in the open while exhaustion and hunger were doing their work for them behind the walls. They kept the Americans on the alert with a show of skirmishing, but that was all. They desired the evacuation of the district, and not the lives of their opponents, in spite of their outcry for the revenge of the death of Jumonville. The young commander had a very bitter moment when the ammunition began to give out and it became apparent that capitulation was the only way out of the dilemma. It takes as much courage to accept an unmerited defeat as to win a difficult victory. George realized that he must either let his men die of starvation in Fort Necessity, or abandon it to the enemy and sacrifice many lives in an attempt to cut a way through the hostile lines. He consented to capitulate, keeping his men, with their arms, and all the honours of war. In the dead of night, under a drenching rain which threatened to eclipse the one guttering candle that served to light the interview, George listened to Van Braam as he hastily interpreted the French terms. Thus, with cold fury in his heart, the young man signed his name to the detested document and marched away with his band of ragged followers. The French were mightily relieved. Colonel Washington had at last been forced to promise that he would not return for a year, and they hoped to have so strengthened their own position by the end of twelve months as to render it impregnable.

"Better luck next time, Colonel," said Major Satterthwaite, as they rode sadly eastwards through the July night, with the rain still pouring down on them from the hot dark sky, and the tramp of their weary, footsore men waking the echoes of the hills. "Though as to luck," he went on, "we've had our share, mind you, in getting off in this dignified fashion! If the French had had a single case of champagne in camp they would have been for tearing us to pieces. Thank God, they had nothing but water!"

"There will be no 'next time,' I fear, Major," replied George. "I have failed in my mission, and the Government that would send me neither food nor ammunition will be disinclined to trust me with another. They want a miracle-worker—not a man!"

"There's one thing that troubles me somewhat, George," began the Major after a moment's pause, and forgetting his military principles so far as to lapse into the old relationship of elder to junior. "It was a deuced dark evening, and the French

were in as much of a hurry to get us away as we were to go—did you entirely take in the purport of the paper you signed? I was busy in preparing the men for the march, according to your orders, but it strikes me you must have had some difficulty with their lingo. How did you make it all out?”

“I had our Dutch friend here to translate for me,” said George. “You know the language well, do you not, Van Braam?” he remarked, as the Dutchman came forward and joined them on a bit of level ground. The fencing-master had grown somewhat thinner, but had not lost his hearty laugh and cheerful demeanour.

“I ought to know it, Colonel,” he said, with a rueful grim. “I have been fighting mossoo ever since I was ten, and I think I know every oath in his collection. He’s a mighty poor swearer, though he is forever at it. No imagination—no variety, all *sacre*—or *ventre*, same d——d thing! We do it better in the Low Countries.” And he laughed deep in his yellow beard. No one had been able to shave for weeks.

“Oaths are not treaties,” growled Satterthwaite. “I wish I had seen the thing myself!”

“You have a French name at the head of that amazing list of yours, Major,” said George, sore with his humiliation. “How do I know it might not give you undue sympathy with the people who coined it. There’s no Gallic sound in ‘Jan Van Braam,’ I think.”

The conversation was interrupted by the difficulties of the road at this point. When a stream had been forded with considerable trouble, and the leaders got their men, drenched and cursing, out on the opposite bank, the subject of the paper was dropped. As a matter of fact, it contained some damaging admissions which poor Van Braam, though acting in entire good faith, had not understood; and he suffered sorely in the public estimation when, later, his negligence was made apparent to the world.

To Mrs. Washington the months of her son’s absence had seemed like years. The loveliness of the Virginian summer brought her little comfort that year, and her flowers seemed to bloom in vain. Her heart was away, beyond the Blue Ridge, whose sapphire heights had bounded in her happiness during the sweet early years, and now seemed but a barrier raised to hide it from her eyes. Thither went her prayers, her thoughts, through the long hot days, while the crop ripened in the furrow and the roses flung their thirsty petals in showers on the sward. The

news of the Jumonville affair filled her with shuddering gratitude. It might have been her first-born's fate to be surprised, shot, buried in one short hour of a summer night. Had some mother's heart in France broken when she heard the news of the French captain's end? "Lord, give us peace! Lord, give us Thy peace!" she would murmur as she passed the garden ways and through the silent rooms, where she was often alone now.

She was thankful for the many claims on her time and strength. Her own younger sons were constantly going and coming between their home and Wakefield, where their half-brother Augustine was always ready to offer them the kindest of welcomes; they were often at Mount Vernon, and also at Kenmore, where Betty's brood was increasing with great rapidity. Robin came often to claim her friendly counsel in the affairs of his young life, saddened at the time of his father's death, and but fitfully brighter now, in spite of his fair hopes for the future.

There was often a cloud on Robin's brow, but his motherly friend dreaded less for him the melancholy of which it spoke than she did a certain feverish elation which came over him at times, and of which she feared to ask the source. The poor lad had entered upon a troublous moral heritage, and at this period of his life Mary, who knew him best, and knew too whence came his burdens, felt that many a struggle lay before the young, wilful, ardent soul. She could but pray for him as she had prayed for his father; and she trusted that his end would be peace, even as his father's had been.

Meanwhile, did a scrap of news float over the Blue Ridge, young Robin was ever among the first of those who ran to bring it to Mrs. Washington. Her old friends and neighbours felt deeply for her in her anxiety; and when the tidings of George's maiden triumph came, they hastened to show her all their joyful appreciation of his good leadership and good fortune. This she took very soberly, thanked God for preserving him in the midst of such dangers, and prayed with all her faithful heart that wars might cease. The news of his reverse at Fort Necessity did not cast her down. George would always do his duty, and had done it, she knew; success or failure lay in God's hands, and God had heard her prayers. There had been but little fighting at Fort Necessity, and George was returning safely home.

Their meeting was a profound joy to her, and her few wise, loving words helped him to bear his failure. He could stay but an hour—yet the hour made up for the long months of waiting and anxiety, and the remembrance of this return would help his

mother through other and more terrible periods of like suspense in time to come.

The Government took a generous view of Colonel Washington's case, and, to his amazement, addressed to him a vote of thanks, of praise for his hard work and masterly retreat, as they were pleased to call it. When he stood up to express his acknowledgments in the House of Burgesses, he was so overcome with confusion that he could not find a single word to say. The revulsion of feeling was very great, and the sounding periods of hearty approbation brought a crimson flush to his cheeks—almost brought the tears to his eyes. Certainly the phrase that pleased him best was the one pronounced so kindly at sight of his confusion by Governor Dinwiddie:—

"Sit down, sit down, Mr. Washington; your modesty is equal to your valour, and does you still greater credit."

But the authorities did not long remain in this reasonable mood. They were enabled to increase the army by a new vote of supplies, and chose this moment to settle, once for all, the vexed question of precedence between regular and colonial troops; the former comprised those who held the King's commission, the latter, those raised and supported by each State for its own defence. The new arrangement was one of such superlative foolishness that it appeared to have been conceived with the object of nullifying all military action. It provided no commanders, generals, or colonels, but gave each company to its independent captain to use as he saw fit. The promulgation was evidently inspired by one made at this moment by George the Second, to the effect that any officer holding a royal commission should outrank any provincial officer of any grade whatever, and that even the highest of the latter, such as generals, should practically cease to be officers at all if a general of regulars was in the field.

Colonel Washington took the only course possible in the circumstances. He resigned his commission in the Virginian army, giving his reasons in a few words of strong and indignant protest, and went home to Mount Vernon. He loved fighting, and the renunciation of his army career caused him profound grief and disappointment; but he could not keep both his commission and his self-respect, so the commission was resigned.

CHAPTER V

THE end of the year found him at Mount Vernon, and, to combat the depression which beset him, he convened a little house party of friends and relations to beguile his solitude. It seemed strange at his age—he was not yet three and twenty—to be leaving so much that he loved behind him in the world, and to find himself not a leader of men in desperate ventures, but the sole master of a great house and property. The house was full of sadness. Memories of the beloved brother Lawrence, of the last sad months passed there with him, made it seem too pathetically familiar for everyday contentment. George had had small traffic with the supernatural element in life; it did not appeal to his healthy, sunny nature; but gentle shades of Sweet Anne and her little delicate girl seemed to hover near, and he longed for more cheerful companionship. The land supplied him with plenty of congenial occupation, out of doors at least, and he resolved to make more of it than most Virginian farmers made of theirs. His love of sport afforded him plenty of interest, too, and he turned his attention to the hounds, which became the progenitors of the famous pack he hunted in later years, to the horses he loved and rode so well, to everything which could help him to forget that he was a born soldier, who had laid sword and uniform aside. It gave him distinct pleasure to play the host, to receive his mother under his own roof, to see Betty Lewis's boys playing about the place, and to act towards his own younger brothers the part which Lawrence had so affectionately fulfilled towards him.

At Mrs. Washington's suggestion he had included Robin McClean in the New Year gathering, though personally he did not feel drawn towards the turbulent lad, still childish enough to get into constant mischief, but too old to be kept in order, and far too full of his own importance to take even a tempered reproof with becoming meekness.

Perhaps there was just some excuse for this last defect, since Robin was wildly elated at holding the King's commission to a cornetcy in his pocket. He had shown it to Mrs. Washington with tears of joy in his eyes, and she had kissed his forehead as she congratulated him on the brilliant prospect now opening before him. Her own children, grown though they were, still felt a certain awe in her presence, and were amazed to behold the gentle indulgence which she exercised towards the young McClean.

To Mary, tired with long responsibility, Robin's fearless, bright affection was very sweet. She would have been grieved to lose it; she would not now run the risk of chilling that happy expansiveness by a single tone or look that might imply harshness or reproach.

The boy was soon to go to New York to join his regiment; the prospect, dispelling for the moment the phantoms which had lately haunted his solitude, filled him with delight; and Mary, in spite of her calm reception of his distressing confidences, was almost equally glad, for his sake.

"I do hope my uniform will arrive while we are here, madam," he had said to her. "I do desire so much to have you see me in it!"

"Of course you must put it on, my dear," she replied, "and let us all see you and wish God-speed to the King's youngest officer!" Then, as she looked into his happy face, now on a level with her own, she thought, "I shall miss the lad and his bright ways, but I am glad for him, after all! Thank God, he seems to have forgotten his troublous dreams here; but, alas, the poor child hath a heavy heritage!"

When she first came as George's guest to Mount Vernon, Mary felt unaccountably shy of her tall, gracious host. Her George, the boy whom she would remember every day of her life, even if she lived to see him a white-haired man, seemed to have been lost beyond the Blue Ridge whither the lad had gone, whence the man had returned five years ago. The change, so fully completed now, had taken place then, but in George's lingering moments of confidence, in his stormy experience with Teresa Carter, his mother had hardly realized it. He had still needed her a little in those days; now he needed no one; his reserve as to all that touched him inwardly was equal to hers. His courteous, open manner, and extreme deference and consideration for others, forbade all attempts to plumb the inner depths of a very strong and profound nature. He asked for no

confidences, and never made any. It was only when some important subject, some point on which he felt keenly and deeply, was touched upon, that a fiery word or quick glance would show which way the current of his feelings set. His attitude, even towards those who knew and loved him best, seemed to say, "All you need of me you shall have—except myself. That is for me alone."

Yet he enjoyed cheerful society, and was always ready to enter into the troubles and perplexities of others, especially those of his own and the younger generation. At his age it is difficult to believe that persons in middle life have absorbing interests or stand in need of sympathy. The early relations of parents and children induce this apparently unfilial insensibility, which is merely a form of ignorance, encouraged by the parents, to keep care from saddening their young people's lives before the proper time.

Mary, who for so many years had been chief ruler in those lives, had made the necessary impression of strength and independence, and complete self-control. How could the grown-up sons, the happy married daughter, dream that in her inner loneliness she long, unspeakably at times, for sympathy with sources of which she had never spoken, for a touch or glance of spontaneous protecting affection to warm the mother heart which had given all and asked for nothing? They thought she had all that was necessary for her comfort and contentment—happiness was scarcely a thing to be looked for, except for their own bright selves and their contemporaries. Youth's cruelties are so unconscious that they must be accepted as part of the general order of things, and maybe do serve like autumn winds to detach the ripened fruit from the tree for the final harvesting.

Mary Washington had steadily put her own feelings aside in the effort to compass her children's moral and material good, and very fully was she rewarded. Yet there were moments when her natural warmth of character also made her regret that she had forgotten how to let it have its way. The clinging, emotional women who never kept back a tear, or a kiss, or a sharp word, looked happy enough, she sometimes thought, and were as well or better loved than she.

The mood was an unworthy one, and she always made haste to drive it away. Yet there was one avowal she longed to make, one acquittal she greatly desired. At this time it seemed as if her earnest wish that George should live, as his forefathers had done, in peace and honour on his own lands, were about to be fulfilled. That was good, but Mary saw a shadow of profound

disappointment in his eyes, and realized that her wish fulfilled was his denied. Her thoughts went back to the dreary time when, in obedience to her, he had given up going to sea. She suffered for him in his disappointment now, and remembered with a pang how much suffering she had caused him then.

So, during this New Year's visit to Mount Vernon, Mary, for the first and last time in her life, appealed to her son's judgment of her in the past.

He was surprised and touched at her doing so. They were standing by a great west window on the stairs, Mrs. Washington holding Betty's last baby, a fine little fellow, in her arms. George had paused beside her, and the low, winter sunshine, streaming in through the casement, turned the child's curls into a haze of gold, lit up Mary's noble face with new splendour, and threw back into George's grey-blue eyes a softer light than they usually wore. He smiled as the baby put up a daring hand and pulled at Mrs. Washington's lace cap.

"You must not do that, young man," he said, detaching the small fingers gently from their prey. "When you are a little older you will know that Madame Grandmamma is not a person with whom you can take liberties."

"Oh, my dear," said Mary, smiling rather whimsically, "he will find that out in time, poor lamb! Meanwhile grandmamma is pleased to know that there is some one in the house who knows much of love and nothing of fear!"

George grew grave. "Madam," he said, "I am surprised that such penetration as yours should mistake respect for fear."

"Ah, I do not," she replied quickly. "But you know, George, that a parent must sometimes tremble lest the two—having been parlous close related in early life, the one should survive, quite fully, without the other. The careless affection of an innocent babe is very sweet to me now, after such long tremblings of heart lest I should love my own to their weakening in their childhood."

"You never did that, mother," said George, kindly. "You were the wisest and best of rulers to us all."

"Yet I was mistaken once," she went on, looking up at him with something like timidity. "My son, I do hope that you have long since forgiven me some pain I then did cause you."

"What, a whipping when I was naughty?" he asked, laughing readily now. "Why, madam, without some correction you would have let loose a passable large and dangerous savage on an unoffending world! I, first, and others for their own sakes, should be deeply beholden to you for such corrections."

"I did not mean that," she said. "You were always good, my dear, and needed not chastisements. I meant about your going to sea. I have reproached myself——"

"Never do so again," he exclaimed with sudden earnestness. "I know that you acted for the best that you could see—that, short as my now ended work for the country's service has been, your act reserved me for that work! Yes, I suffered, I admit, and you suffered also. It was a painful time for both of us, yet I hoped it had taught my wise mother something she should remember to-day, that her son never faltered in his affection and respect for her, even when he was cast down from his high hopes."

"You were, indeed, good, George," she said. "You are a very loyal and generous son, and your words do comfort my heart. You feel no bitterness against me for the old hurt? I have many times longed to ask you, and I was afraid—I was afraid."

He laid his hand on her shoulder with gentle earnestness. "Dear mother," he said, "I can truly say that I have never had a bitter thought on the subject. Such would be impossible in regard to you. Put away such fear for ever! There is Betty beckoning to us from the garden. Shall we go out for a moment? The evening is mild for the time of the year."

Mary looked up into the face she had first beheld on a fair spring morning three and twenty years before. Her first prayer over the child of her desire came back to her in this day of fulfilment, and she bent her head and kissed the firm white hand that had been so lovingly laid on her shoulder. That hand had been offered to the Lord in its stainless infancy, and she knew that it would never fail His work in peace or strife.

In the silence of perfect understanding, mother and son stood looking out toward the sunset fires. Below, in the garden, they saw Robin join Betty, and link his arm in hers with happy familiarity.

Betty, a beautiful young matron now, her dark eyes still flashing with laughter, her fair face set off to perfection by her softly powdered hair, her tall figure catching the sun on curve and sweep of rich brocade, looked with amused indulgence on the bright bold boy at her side. Little powder ever clung to his curly red-gold locks by this hour of the day; he was talking fast, with the low sun shining in his blue eyes, and his slender limbs seemed to find trouble in keeping pace slow enough to match his companion's majestic step on the short grass. They sauntered along, turned

and looked up again at the window where George and Mrs. Washington, with the little one still in her arms, stood watching them. The child suddenly stretched out his hands to his pretty mother, and she answered the gesture with a smile.

"Madam," said George, as his glance fell on Robin, "I, too, have a question which I would like to ask, if it shall not seem an intrusive one. What is the reason of your great kindness to that pleasing but most unruly lad?"

"He is an orphan," replied Mrs. Washington, "and I knew—a relative of his many years ago. 'Tis a sad story, dear son, and I would not willingly speak of it at this happy time."

"Never do so, dearest madam, if the remembering of it shall bring you one melancholy thought," he replied quickly. "I would not grieve you for the world."

"I knew you would not, George," she said; "but the day may come when, for Robin's sake, I should wish you to know it. You have every right to ask the question. But now, come, let us go out to Betty."

Mother and son passed down the stairway and out into the garden. One ray from the setting sun shot through the trees and lit up George's face with a sudden glory, leaving his mother beside him in the tender shadow of approaching twilight.

He knew not, the modest, gallant, christian gentleman, that in the life before him he was to encounter all the suns that do glorify, all the storms that must assail, the strongest of men. Mary, the lonely, faithful woman would watch, intrepid and calm through a thousand anxieties, that splendid career, of which each step was to wring her heart with some new fear for her best-loved son. Not for her its glory and radiance. Her portion was to be that for which she had ever prayed and striven, the inner peace of a trusting and humble heart. Mary Washington was to die as she had lived, in the Shadow of the Lord.

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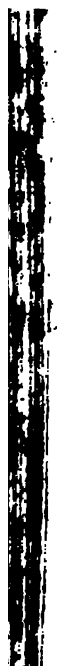
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